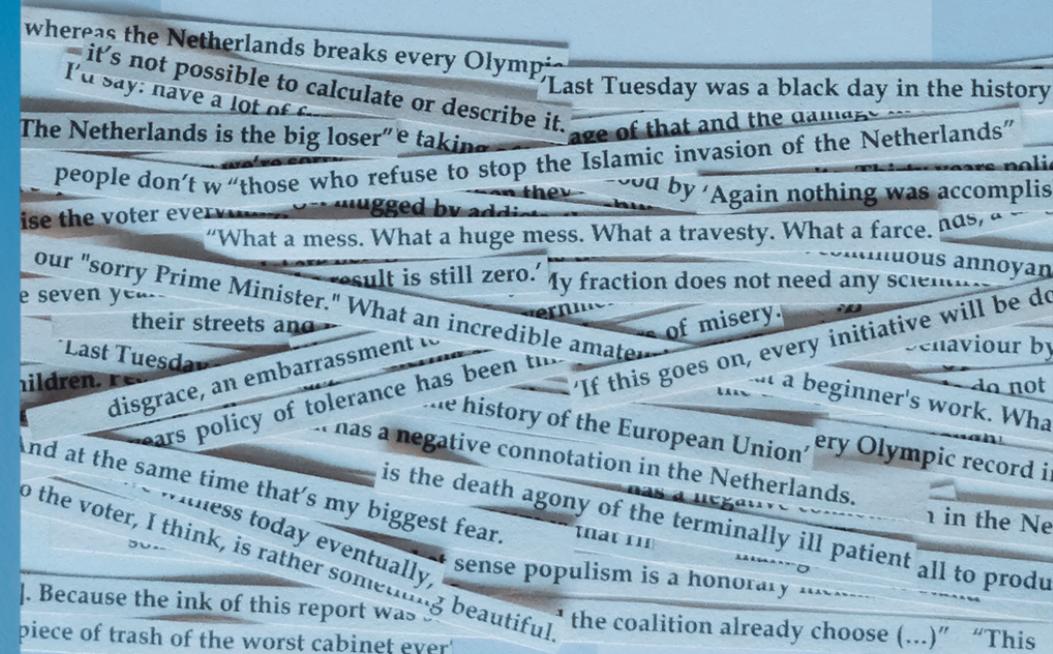


How to Make Politics... Bigger, Better & Simpler

The Analysis of Metaphor, Hyperbole and Simplification in the (Populist) Rhetoric of Politicians in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) in the 21st Century

Words are not harmless; the way in which we use words and language matters for how we perceive the world around us, how we give meaning to it and determine power relations between people and societies. It is not hard to imagine the value of knowing how to use language – eloquence and rhetoric – for political gains. How to win a debate, how to get more attention, how to persuade a potential voter, how to win elections? ‘Rhetorical’ words – imagery, exaggerations and simplifications – contribute to make political promises more appealing or to stand out more in the overload of words. There is, in other words, much to gain with the proper use of language in the political game. How convenient would it be for a politician to possess a manual for ‘How to make politics... bigger, better and simpler’?

The aim of the study is to analyse the use of different rhetorical variables, namely the use of the rhetorical figures of metaphor and hyperbole – and the connection to the level of cognitive complexity of reasoning – in political language in the political contexts of Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands. Although this dissertation is not a guide for politicians in order to win elections, it will give an insight in the use of language and rhetoric in current politics. How do circumstances, such as political crisis and elections, change political rhetoric? Why are certain parties more rhetorical than others? And what can we say about the radical rhetorical style that is often attributed to the successful but also criticised populist parties?



Lieuwe Kalkhoven

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Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) in
the 21st Century

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Printed by: proefschriftmaken.nl

Cover and design by: Marthe Kalkhoven © (www.marthekalkhoven.com)

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Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van
doctor in de Sociale Wetenschappen: Politieke Communicatie
aan de Universiteit Antwerpen te verdedigen door:

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Promotor: Prof. Dr. Christ' l De Landtsheer

Antwerpen, 2016

"And this is what I want to tell you: Words are the most

effective weapons of death in man's arsenal. But they can also

be powerful tools of life. They may be the only ones."

Paul Rusesabagina

'An ordinary Man' (2006)

PREFACE

The power of words

In 1994 a Rwandan hotel manager named Paul Rusesabagina personally saved 1,268 of people from the genocide in Rwanda by hiding them in his hotel. He later wrote in his autobiography 'An Ordinary Man' that "[t]he entire world had gone mad around me. What had caused this to happen? Very simple: words"ⁱ. Even in this extreme situation of civil war and brutal genocide he acknowledged that it is not weapons but words that have the real power: "It was a poisonous stream of rhetoric designed to reinforce the power of the elite". If history teaches us anything it is certainly that we should not underestimate the power of words by political leaders. Similar as for instance Musolf (2007) points out, describing the impact of the dehumanizing, medical imagery used by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. Although these may seem extreme examples of how words can turn into powerful tools, it does describe what consequences are possible when a frame of discourse is systematically implemented. After all, as the saying goes, *the pen is mightier than the sword*.

Our understanding of society is enclosed in discourse and language, and our words are highly political. Political discourse shapes our ideological reality: it is our notion of the world, it determines our beliefs, and even our behaviour. Thus, when a person in a powerful position knows how to use the words for their own political course, that person can be highly influential. In our 21st century, the times may have changed and the contexts may be different, but words that are used for political reasons still signify what we think and how we treat one another. There are many examples of the influence of language on the world's course of events, not only in history, but also in the last decade. Several recent studies show how the language among political leaders after 9/11 shifted into more rhetorical languageⁱⁱ. Studies on media coverage show that language used in (news) media regularly dehumanizes 'the enemy'ⁱⁱⁱ, whereas in the last decades this dehumanizing imagery also sets to continue towards 'the Muslim' or 'the immigrant' in general^{iv}. With the asylum crisis that started in 2015 in Europe (and beyond), this is still a hot and controversial issue. For example, after UK's Prime Minister David Cameron

warned for "a swarm" of migrants wanting to come into Britain^v, the debate about the impact of (those) words was again fuelled^{vi}.

It is not hard to imagine the value of knowing how to use language – eloquence and rhetoric – for political gains. How to win a debate, how to get more attention, how to persuade a potential voter, how to win elections. 'Rhetorical' words – imagery, exaggerations and simplifications – assumably contribute to make political promises more appealing or to stand out more in the overload of words. There is, in other words, much to gain with the proper use of language in the political game. That is in a sense today's power of words. How convenient would it be for a politician to possess a manual for 'How to make politics... bigger, better and simpler'?

Admittedly, this work is not a guide for politicians in order to win elections, and I don't believe that there is or ever will be one. This dissertation is meant to give an insight in the use of language and rhetoric in current politics. I hope that at the end of the nine different chapters the reader will have an idea of the (increasing) importance of words in politics, how politicians use them (differently) and why it is characteristic for contemporary political movements.

"And this is what I want to tell you: Words are the most effective weapons of death in man's arsenal. But they can also be powerful tools of life. They may be the only ones."

Notes

- i** This and the following quotes in this section are by Paul Rusesabagina from his autobiography 'An Ordinary Man' (2006), Introduction.
- ii** E.g. Bligh, Kohles and Meindl (2004); Ferrari (2009).
- iii** E.g. Steuter and Wills (2008, 2010); Matusitz (2013).
- iv** Among many others e.g. Leach (2003); Leyens et al. (2007); Steuter and Wills (2009); Esses, Medianu and Lawson (2013).
- v** Source: <http://www.itv.com/news/update/2015-07-30/pm-a-swarm-of-migrants-want-to-come-to-britain/>
- vi** As for instance is well argued in this article: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/07/30/why-the-language-we-use-to-talk-about-refugees-matters-so-much/>. But also organizations such as the United Nations enunciated their concerns for the language that is used towards asylum seekers, e.g. after the Paris attacks in November 2015: <http://www.unhcr.org/564b1f786.html>.

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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

"Like colours, words have different effects depending on how

they sit alongside each other in combination, in what order

they come, how different words might substitute for each

other and what happens when some are missed out."

James Martin

'Politics and Rhetoric.

A critical introduction' (2014, p. 73)

THE SUBJECT OF RESEARCH

What is this dissertation about?

This dissertation, entitled “The Analysis of Metaphor, Hyperbole and Simplification in the Rhetoric of (Populist) Politicians in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) in the 21st Century”, examines the strategic use of political rhetoric in political communication. The main question that is raised is: what are the characteristics, the similarities and the differences in the use of the rhetorical figures metaphor and hyperbole, and the cognitive element of simplification in political language in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) in the past decade?

The aim for the study is to analyse the strategic use of words, or rhetoric, in political language. Additionally, a second objective is to link (strategic) rhetoric to the particular language of populism and populist leaders in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). As argued in the preface, words are not harmless; the way in which we use words and language matters for how we perceive the world around us, how we give meaning to it and determine power relations between people and societies. Words are necessities to describe the world we live in, they create the concepts in which we think and behave (e.g. Edelman, 1974). Words restrict us as well; we are not really capable of thinking outside the language we use, or to put it in the words of Wittgenstein: “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (1922, p. 149). Our realities are shaped by the notion of what we think is objective (or appears to be), however, a semantic representation is always subjective: what words do we choose? How do we express ourselves? What is implied? “Like colours, words have different effects depending on how they sit alongside each other in combination, in what order they come, how different words might substitute for each other and what happens when some are missed out” (Martin, 2014, p. 73).

This is especially applicable to political contexts, in which external and internal and factors such as (changing) political circumstances, political ideology, leadership style, and a party’s political ‘role’ in parliament could make for a distinction in which and how

words are used. The research purposes of this study are twofold. First of all, I attempt to describe particular rhetorical characteristics of the language used by politicians in the Netherlands and Flanders (descriptive analysis). Second of all, we are looking for differences in rhetorical language between the subjects of research (politicians, parties, etc.) in each study (comparative research).

About political rhetoric

In this dissertation I aim to analyse (particular use of) rhetoric in political language. With doing this I wish to obtain a better understanding of differences in the political realm and to explore the characteristics that are often ascribed as style features of particular politicians or even political parties. For instance, rhetoric is usually directly linked to the particular style (and success) of populism and populist leaders. However, this is still a relatively unknown or opaque territory. Earlier I argued that words are not harmless items, but actually have influence in the establishment of our reality and the power relations within. But why is it important (or even necessary) to study rhetoric as part of the political realm? To answer this question, we should firstly have a notion of what political rhetoric means and why rhetoric plays an important role in political communication.

Defining rhetoric

Today an increasing number of studies are devoted to political rhetoric as subject for research in linguistic, communication, political and social sciences (see Condor, Tileagă and Billig, 2013, for an overview). Political rhetoric can be seen as the use of classical rhetoric, which is (simply put) the ‘art of persuasion’ (mostly) through language, applied to a (modern) political context (see *inter alia* Windt and Ingold, 1987; De Landtsheer, 1998a; Billig, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2005; Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Condor et al., 2013; Martin, 2014). Rhetoric is probably the oldest described form of communication. Already in ancient Greece the ‘art of speech and oration’ was known, studied, and performed by the intellectual elites. Aristotle wrote in his well-known standard *Rhetorica* about language and style as a means to empower argumentation, to aim for persuasion, eloquence and ‘to speak well’ (in e.g. Billig, 2003; Reisigl, 2008). Seeing rhetoric as a

valued quality, Aristotle argued, a competent orator has the ability to combine three persuasive factors in order to affect the audience, which he called *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. *Ethos* refers to the character, the authority, the norms and values, the speaker wishes to present. *Pathos* is the mood or tone of the speech – this is often explained as the emotional component. *Logos* involves the use of logical argumentation (Billig, 2003).

Although rhetoric is seen as a central part of communication, it yet seems difficult to obtain a general and universal definition of rhetoric from a scientific perspective (Condor et al., 2013). Nowadays, rhetoric is usually seen in a pejorative way, as being insincere, misleading or empty. Politicians are often accused of being ‘mere rhetoric’, as in that they express themselves without real content, bombastic, or use words ‘to spin’ their own or the opponent’s argumentation. A rhetorical question is asked, as by definition, to create a dramatic effect or to make a point in a stylistic manner, rather than to (expect to) get an answer¹. Rhetoric is therefore often perceived as meaningless, merely for form, and without any substantial content. However, as I argue frequently throughout this dissertation, political rhetoric – and the use of rhetorical elements – is more than decorating the acts of speech and discourse, it is also a skill and knowledge. It is described as “the practical *art* of effective communication or as the ability of using eloquence in speech acts (Condor et al., 2013, pp. 263-264). This skill of communication also contains clear substantive goals. In the classical Aristotelian and still most common understanding, rhetoric has been defined as (the discovery of) the available means to empower argumentation in order to persuade the public or (political) opposition in the debate (e.g. in Billig, 2003).

Political persuasion

Rhetoric and persuasion are inseparable: any definition of rhetoric includes the idea of persuasion (Charteris-Black, 2005). Persuasion aims at the interactive use of communication messages to ‘convince’ the message receiver to adapt certain (usually different) beliefs, attitudes and/or behaviour (Jowett and O’Donnell, 1992; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland, 2004). Both the speaker’s and listener’s attitudes, behaviour and belief systems are connected to the language or rhetoric that is used. Linguists and discourse theorists argue that access to discourse and communication is an important

resource of power. “[M]odern’ and often more effective power is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to *change the mind of others in one’s own interest*” (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 254, italic in original). Politics involves above all making judgements in contexts of uncertainty about what to do, for which persuasion is required (Martin, 2014, p. 1). Rhetoric and persuasion in specific are therefore exercises of power. The general idea is that everything is rhetorical in a sense, as we constantly use language to influence people’s mind, and letting ourselves be influenced, mostly through “subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear ‘natural’ and quite ‘acceptable’” (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 254; Martin, 2014). Although there are many different ‘available means’ to use rhetoric in a persuasive way, arguably language is most prominent in both practice and in research.

Rhetoric consists of multiple elements, namely on one side *discovery* and *arrangement* (i.e. the content and shape, the *logos* of argumentation), and on the other side *style* and *delivery* (Martin, 2014). Theories in the social and linguistic psychology often characterise argumentative rhetoric (such as discovery and arrangement) as a means to establish the comprehensive and positive in-group behaviour and beliefs, and ignores or restricts the out-group’s ideology (Turner, 1987; Van Dijk, 1993a; Bull, 2000). Style concerns the use of language: the choice of words, the figures and forms of speech and the overall tone of discourse, whereas delivery deals with techniques and qualities of performance. These latter are the aesthetic, theatrical qualities of speech. Style and delivery are often seen as superficial aspects, but are in fact highly important in influencing *ethos* and *pathos* of argumentation. “The link between language, ethos and pathos is of particular importance in political life, especially in democracies where the connection between citizens and their representatives is desired but never assured” (Martin, 2014, p. 72). Ethos is an important part, because style of rhetoric says a lot about the speaker. Every political movement reckons on and often benefits from a recognizable ‘style’, a distinctive *identity* that accompanies a programmatic content. Burke (1969) argued that identification lies at the heart of all persuasive rhetoric as for “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (p. 55). Once politicians have found a style that works for them, they are likely to continue with it as much as possible (Martin, 2014). Pathos creates an emotional connection between speaker and audience, a necessary ground for persuasion. These ‘theatrical’ rhetorical elements play very significant roles

in political speech: it makes us understand the argument (or the fact that an argument is made) much better, because emphasis is made, urgency is expressed, and moral convictions are made in order to help identification (see Burke, 1969).

Although persuasion is probably the main goal in politics, it appears rather difficult to convince people who usually have deeply rooted ideas about the world, to take over a new system of beliefs. Jowett and O'Donnell argue that “[p]eople are reluctant to change; thus, in order to convince them to do so, the persuader has to relate change to something in which the persuadee [one who is persuaded] already believes” (1992, pp. 22-23). “Persuasion either seeks to confirm or to challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours – persuasion is never devoid of intention” (Charteris-Black, 2005, p. 10). Of course the character of the speaker, the authority (or ethos), plays an important role as argued before, but whereas logic argumentation often encounters resistance in the human ‘psyche’, it appears that emotional loaded messages are much more effective (e.g. Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). As “persuasion requires, ideally speaking, complete emotional and affective resonance between the persuader and the audience” (Kecskemeti, 1973, p. 86), arousing emotions, e.g. by appealing to emotional experiences, can be an important factor in political persuasion. Many rhetorical figures are believed to contain or arouse *pathos*, because often the reference of the figurative to the literal involves a relationship between argument and emotive experience.

The power of rhetorical figures

In recent years the study of rhetorical figures has gained more appreciation (Condor et al., 2013). In argumentative and persuasive rhetoric there is a central role for rhetorical devices (e.g. Billig, 2003). Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) argued that (a) rhetorical effect is more likely to be conceived if the message is empowered by a rhetorical figure. Figures of speech cause a memorable style of language, as “distinct ways of shaping language to enhance its connotative and denotative effects” (Martin, 2014, p. 75). They deviate from ‘normal words’: they stand out and catch our interest. There is an often very ambiguous difference between the denotation (literal reference to the described object) and connotation (association between objects), which makes the meaning of the described object (intentionally) open for interpretation. Most rhetorical devices involve a particular use of words that (can) have a strategic effect that is aimed at an extra-

substantive meaning (the pragmatic semiotic meaning). In other words, the possible effect that the rhetorical element generates is more profound than the actual substantive meaning (the pure semantic semiotic meaning) of the words that are used. Our daily language is full of rhetorical elements, often unnoticed, just as part of our language. But just as well purposely, e.g. to brighten-up our parlance, to emphasize something, or to make a point. Moreover, it mostly appears that figurative words are more or less consciously chosen to describe something in a particular way, that could have been described differently, presumably with less (rhetorical) impact. The actual subject (or target) as such is for instance being enlarged, reduced, replaced into a different context, and so on.

Normally, figures of speech are placed into two categories: schemes and tropes (e.g. Martin, 2014). Schemesⁱⁱ are arranged (or arrangements of) words, such as phrasing, repetition, word order, omission of words, etc. The words themselves are not rhetorical, but the effect comes from the particular use of them. Tropes, such as metaphor, analogies, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole and irony, are words that create or specify meaning because of their connotation. For a long time rhetorical figures have been considered harmless style items in language without any substantive nature of its own. It was seen only as a means of expressing ideas, but in different words, thus the denotation of the figurative imagery would be solely a derivative of the origin (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004). As research in linguistic and discourse analysis developed throughout the years, more and more scholars emphasized the political weight of language itself, and that speech act and verbal behaviour matters in a rhetorical sense, as we have argued before. The power of several rhetorical elements is that they operate at a latent level, because they appeal to existing emotions or arouse deeply rooted emotions. Most people are usually hardly aware of the presence of rhetorical elements in oral or written communication, and therefore the assumed persuasion often occurs unconsciously, implicitly and outside the self-control. Moreover, many rhetorical figures are believed to have strong persuasive effects because they possess the possibility of deception. Reality is depicted differently (more beautiful, more important, bigger, stronger, simpler, funnier, etc.) by means of rhetorical elements (e.g. Conger, 1991; Wodak, 2002, 2003; Van der Valk, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2005).

The importance of rhetorical research

There are different views on political research. Traditionally, politics can be seen as “activities and institutions related to state organization” (Gruenert, 1974, in De Landtsheer, 1998, p. 3) or (in other words) the ‘governance’ of a country, area or state. This definition is also often applicable for the domain of political science: the study of institutional politics (e.g. the activities of governments and the relations between governments of different states, state regulations, the organization of political parties). A different view on politics considers the activities of politics as a social event, which involves the aspects of social interaction between people or groups. Several social scientists state that politics is “about the competition for power and control in social groups” (Weber, 1919) or about “social conflict” (e.g. Nimmo, 1978, p. 6). Politics is, according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the social organization that is the outcome of continuous political processes. The social interplay within politics is usually subject to humanity sciences, such as sociology, psychology – when it comes to the study of behaviourism – or through the communication and rhetoric – when it comes to the study of language.

Politics and the use of language or discourse^{iv} are inseparably connected to each other (Shapiro, 1982). “Politics is largely a matter of words. Negotiations are held, speeches are made, debates take place, bargains are struck” as a form of oral communication, whereas written utterances are expressed in “laws, proclamations, treaties, and other political documents” as well as in several forms of media exposure (De Landtsheer, 1998a, pp. 4-5). Both communication and politics can be perceived as processes of social interaction, which both rely on the transaction of messages and/or the exchange of symbols in a broad sense (De Landtsheer, 1998a).

Rhetoric has always been seen as inevitably politicalⁱⁱⁱ, and politics as inevitably rhetorical, “because public discussion and debate are essential in a democracy, and because leaders are obliged to rule the sovereign people by means of constant persuasion, rhetoric is absolutely central” (Kane and Patapan, 2010, p. 372). This was already acknowledged by the Greek and (later) Roman civilizations, in which rhetoric as oratory (rhetoric derives from the Greek word *ρητορ*, i.e. *rètor*, meaning *orator* or public speaker) was seen as a form of (necessary) skill or art that was needed within the democratic forums.

Throughout history many politicians reverted to the techniques of *the rhetoric* that were passed on by the classical knowledge, in which body language (formal gestures), tone and intonation (loud voice), and (other) non-verbal skills were seen as most important – naturally considering that speakers had to reach mass-audiences without any technical support. Although the idea and study of (aspects of) rhetoric remained to be persevered through the centuries, it was on the turn of our modern age that a revival of rhetorical study occurred. With the advent of (the power of) language as subject of research, the so-called Linguistic turn in the beginning of the 20th century, the focus altered to the linguistic aspects of rhetoric: the way of using signs and symbols as characteristics of language and persuasion. Later, the development of electronic and mass media changed (the idea of) rhetoric completely, in which classic oratory, eloquence and public speech have been replaced by informal, personalised and commercialised rhetoric (Condor et al., 2013).

The difficulty of studying political rhetoric is the highly divergent academic field of study. There are several disciplines that somehow are connected to the use of language and rhetoric, but they usually expose their own academic tradition of theory and methodology. Consequently there is a gap in connections between studies on the same matter, as well as in terminology that is used to describe similar objects. Much of the research concentrates therefore on “individual piecemeal studies, rather than systematic, incremental, research programs” (Condor et al., 2013, p. 287). The authors continue by stating that “[r]hetoric is essentially and inevitably complex, reflexive, argumentative, fluid, and contextual” (p. 287), which leads to the observation that unlike in many other research traditions, there is often absence of political constructs that are distinguished into dependent, independent, moderating and mediating variables. That is why so many scholars are reluctant to dedicate their work to rhetorical analysis on a broad scale, leading to significant gaps in the existing literature on this matter.

However, my argument is that it is actually important to study political rhetoric on a broad and systematic scale, beyond the individual case studies alone. Indeed, the field of study on political rhetoric is highly interdisciplinary, as it connects the use of language to psychological processes such as attitudes and behaviour, to political elites and leadership, and to institutional political science. But this is also its power. By means of rhetorical analysis we attempt to expose political differences, trends and developments

that cannot be obtained by looking (only) at the manifest structures of political relations, but also at the latent, less-obvious political behaviour and motivations. Rhetoric is therefore one of these instruments that exposes and predicts political action. “Analysis of the fine detail of political rhetoric reveals social categories and stereotypes to be objects of continual contestation, and draws our attention to the ways in which political actors may attend to multiple facets of their identity simultaneously” (Condor et al., 2013, p. 287).

About metaphor, hyperbole and simplification

The studies in this dissertation are above all focused on rhetorical figures in political language, which form the most important variables. More specifically, the rhetorical figures of metaphor (in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7) and hyperbole (in Chapters 4, 5 and 8) are at the centre of most empirical studies, along with simplification of arguing, expressed in the level of integrative complexity (both in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5). Metaphor and rhetorical exaggeration, or hyperbole, are interesting rhetorical elements to examine more comprehensively. Metaphors “stylistically shape tone and content of an argument, because they permit speakers to re-describe situations, objects, agents or experiences in selective ways that subtly shape how judgements about them are to be made” (Martin, 2014, p. 80). It is part of the constant negotiation in politics to define contexts and actions. Hyperbole makes a deliberate exaggeration of a point to magnify its significance. Whereas both metaphor and hyperbole are often used as a rhetorical strategy to simplify discourse, it would be interesting to link the use of rhetorical variables to the either simplicity or complexity of arguing, which can be measured by the level of integrative complexity (e.g. in Chapter 5). Although Chapter 2 concerns a more in-depth explanation about the methodology that is used to analyse these rhetorical variables, in this section I elaborate on what defines metaphor, hyperbole and simplification and why it is important to study them.

Why study metaphor?

Metaphors are among the most studied rhetorical objects in social and linguistic literature (see e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004; Musolff,

2007; De Landtsheer, 2007, 2009; Steen, 2008; among many others). Metaphor is seen as an instrument of *cross-domain mapping*, which is the cognitive and linguistic understanding and experience of one thing based on something else (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). A metaphor transfers words or groups of words into a different, alien context. The interaction between the original meaning (the *source*) and the sphere in which the source is transferred (the *target*) consequently generates new meaning (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004, pp. 9-10). Politics is, for example, regularly depicted as a game, in which the comparable politics-as-game, transfers the idea of politics (source) into the notion of sports or games (target). Whereas the original source’s name (politics) or a direct reference to it, and the syntactical clues of the comparable (‘is-a’, ‘as’ or ‘like’) are often omitted (e.g. “the president played the game very well”), we are mostly still capable of linking the target to the source. At the same time, characteristics of the target are (implicitly) attributed to the original source, and therefore the outcome of the metaphor creates new meaning. Politics-as-game implies, for instance, that as in a game there is always a winner and a loser in politics.

Why are metaphors of importance in politics? Metaphors are pre-eminently the most important political stylistic devices (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Nearly every politician uses this instrument for political goals, hoping to get attention, to attract the electorate, in order to collect votes, or to encourage a dissent opinion. The use of metaphors is popular in *politics*, because multiple rhetorical characters congregate in the metaphor, such as the plain formulation or ‘simplification’ of complex politics (Sopory and Dillard, 2002), and are ideal for using either exaggeration or euphemism. Metaphors appeal to the emotions of the audience and therefore have persuasive effects (Kövecses, 2000; Gibbs, Leggitt and Turner, 2002; Sopory and Dillard, 2002). Emotions are the cognition’s directors: they select our beliefs, indicate our priorities and determine our attention, and they even distort the entrance to our memories. Metaphors have similar effects: they guide our knowledge into a specific direction (Feder Kittay, 1987). By using metaphors we categorize and choose a certain perspective. Metaphors are particularly suitable as a rhetorical device in the process of ‘management of anxiety’ (either reassurance or frightening). David Cameron’s statement of “a swarm of migrants” that we used as an illustration of the power of words, in the beginning of this dissertation, is a good example of the power of metaphors. A complex phenomenon (migration) is simplified by the use of the metaphor. Moreover, a different, negative connotation is created, as the word

'swarm' is likely to arouse negative emotions such as anxiety and unrest. Metaphors are sometimes noted as 'powerful weapons', or 'sleeping poison', because they can influence people's minds unconsciously (Musolff, 2007). The power of metaphors in politics is that they can break through long-standing political opinions, they can prepare the people for new political structures, and they can activate or deactivate preconceptions (De Landtsheer, 2009).

This dissertation tries to make a contribution to the existing research on metaphor by making a quantitative study of this rhetorical variable, not only as part of changing communication styles, but also as a characteristic of political ideology. In Chapter 3 ("The smell of crisis") the rhetorical variable 'metaphor' is studied as part of the crisis rhetoric that could vary not only between crisis and non-crisis situation, but also as part of the political communication of different political parties. Chapter 7 ("The imagery of Geert Wilders") elaborates further on this figure of speech in a specific case study as we focus on the metaphorical language of the Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders.

Why study hyperbole?

A rhetorical exaggeration, or *hyperbole*, is defined as an exaggerated form of phrasing in which words or a clustered group of words express an exceptional, extreme and often false representation of reality (see e.g. Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b; McCarthy and Carter, 2004; Cano Mora, 2009; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010; Ritter, 2010). Exaggeration or overstatement in informal or argumentative dialogue happens regularly in our daily-life talk, but it also passes often unnoticed, or with little attention or recognition by the listener (McCarty and Carter, 2004). How do we then recognize a hyperbolic expression when we see one? In general, just like metaphor, a hyperbole creates a new meaning because of the discrepancy between what is said (denotation) and what is meant (connotation). Within the exaggeration there is a certain (degree of) deviation in respect to the standards that define the literal in its linguistic (surrounding words/sentences) or social (real world) contexts. A hyperbolic utterance is often an intensification of reality by purpose, which seems (therefore) odd with the general context, counterfactual, or marks even an impossibility between actual and figurative worlds (McCarthy and Carter, 2004). Hyperboles, however, are generally accepted into our daily conversation and are not perceived as falsities or lies (although it is often

technically quite plausibly false). When a person A tells person B that he or she 'just drank the best coffee that was ever made' – which is very unlikely and even impossible to know – person B will probably immediately understand the rhetorical exaggeration as a figurative expression of person A's appreciation of said coffee.

In general, people have a natural tendency to exaggerate situations in order to make their language more humorous and/or attractive (e.g. Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; Colston and O'Brien, 2000a). They actually make this effort in search for attention and recognition (Ritter, 2010), to create a surprise or accentuate a contrast (e.g. Colston and Keller, 1998; Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b), and to express their deception or irritation implicitly or evasively by using hyperbolic irony (e.g. McCarthy and Carter, 2004; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010). The fact that hyperboles (re)shape reality in a certain way makes them powerful tools for persuasion (e.g. Swartz, in McCarthy and Carter, 2004). Ritter (2010) argues that a hyperbole is a stylish way to make people see 'the truth' by the use of a deceptive exaggeration imbued with *pathos*. The rhetorical effect is, once again, that it appeals to the emotions of the audience (Ritter, 2010), as well as that it is used by speakers in order to empower their own emotions (Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010) and to simplify reasoning and argumentation. Arguably, considering the persuasive purpose of political discourse in the debate and towards the electorate, the intentional use of hyperboles can be a strategic, non-substantive tool for persuasion. Hypothetically, the occurrence of hyperbole should be prominent in political language, but it is uncertain to what extent and how it is used. Whereas we argued that metaphor is probably the most studied rhetorical figure, the study of hyperbole is (surprisingly) rather absent in social and political scientific literature.

In three empirical studies in this dissertation I try to establish the recognition of the rhetorical figure of *hyperbole* in political language in addition to the existing (and lack of) academic literature. Chapter 4 ("The use of hyperbole in political language") is dedicated to the establishment of a methodological instrument to detect and analyse hyperbolic language in current political rhetoric (i.e. in Flemish parliamentary debates). The next chapter (Chapter 5: "Politics, it has never been so simple") analyses the particular use of hyperbole, in relation to the complexity of arguing, among political elites in parliamentary debates in the Netherlands. Finally, as with metaphor it is often argued that populist rhetoric consist of hysterical, extreme and hyperbolic language,

although this has not yet been established in quantitative empirical research (e.g. Van Dijk, 1993a; Abts, 2004; Van Leeuwen, 2012; Bos et al., 2013). Chapter 8 (“A piece of trash of the worst cabinet ever”) focuses on the specific rhetoric of populism, with again Geert Wilders’ *Party of Freedom* (PVV) as a case study, in comparison to the use of hyperbole by ‘mainstream’ political parties in the Dutch parliament.

Why study cognitive complexity?

Cognitive complexity should be perceived as the integrative structure of language, which is essentially the effort that is put into reasoning and argumentation. Complexity theories depart from the idea that an individual’s cognitive ability of information processing depends on the levels of differentiation (the ability to distinguish different viewpoints) and integration (the ability to make conceptual connections among differentiated dimensions) (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Thoemmes and Conway, 2007). Low levels of complexity, for which we also use the antonym simplicity (expressed in the rhetorical act of simplification), can be defined as engaged in ‘black-white’ thinking, zero-sum judgments, and the unwillingness to accept uncertainty or other points of view (or even the consideration of their existence). On the other side of the spectrum, people with high integrative complexity maintain high acceptance of uncertainty, and have the ability to synthesize opposing viewpoints (Thoemmes and Conway, 2007, p. 195). This pluralist reasoning requires “more time, energy, concentration, and information-seeking and assessing mechanisms, and may lead to the neglect of other problems”, but this leads also to more deliberated and harmonious decisions (Suedfeld, Lavallee and Brough, 1998, p. 171). On the other hand, simplified rhetoric fulfils particular emotional needs, stimulates (the speed of) decision-making processes, and makes language and decisions easier to understand and comprehend (e.g. Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988).

Various internal and external circumstances could cause differences in complex versus simple rhetoric among political leaders. Different studies show that (political) crises, for example, cause an increase or decrease in the level of complexity in communication (i.e. the decision-making process). The way in which political communication is expressed depends heavily on the level of psychological stress, that influence “the information processing complexity of the individuals involved” (e.g. Holsti, 1972, in Suedfeld and

Tetlock, 1977, p. 170). However, the level of complexity in cognitive reasoning is not only a phenomenological effect of circumstances outside the self-control, it can also be perceived as a rhetorical strategy to intentionally simplify (or complicate) the argumentation and reasoning. According to theory, political leaders are likely to avoid complex language and simplify their rhetoric if it is politically beneficial in certain circumstances (e.g. Jervis, 1976; Stein, 2013; Levy, 2013). Non-complex rhetoric makes political decisions and discussion easier to understand and fulfils certain emotional needs, such as the arousing of comfort or reassurance, amongst the audience.

Through (the power of) language and rhetoric, politicians have potentially effective means to simplify the act of political practice. Both metaphor and hyperbole are for example used for simplification matters. However, it is the use of the figure of speech itself that is considered to have simplifying power, but we have to keep in mind that rhetorical devices are linguistic and often semantic psychological features. The complexity (or simplicity) of reasoning or arguing, however, is a characteristic of language itself and should be perceived as the cognitive psychological structure of language. The (level of integrative) complexity of language is not by definition linked to rhetoric, it does not concern the specific use of words (as is contrarily exactly the case with the use of rhetorical figures), and it is thus not a strategy of *language*, but rather a matter of *structure*: the cognitive efforts that are put in arguing or reasoning (Baker-Brown et al., 1992). It could therefore be interesting to link the cognitive structure of language to the rhetorical use of language and to its effects. Whereas earlier research already found a positive correlation between the rhetorical variable metaphor and the level of integrative complexity (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004; De Landtsheer, 2007), we therefore also aim to establish a relationship between the use of hyperbole and the level of integrative complexity.

In this dissertation the study of varying levels of integrative complexity turns up as part of the crisis communication study in Chapter 3 (“The smell of crisis”) as well as in Chapter 5 (“Politics, it has never been so simple”). In the latter study the complexity of arguing is connected to the degree of the rhetorical variable ‘hyperbole’ in language used by party leaders in the Dutch parliament.

About populism

As I have argued, political language is not merely used as an extension piece of the ideology that is expressed (the ‘words’ that plea the ‘virtues’ message); political language in the form of rhetoric is also the most prominent means to realize politically strategic goals, such as to gain electoral support. However, there are certain ‘ground rules’ in order to be (potentially more) successful as a political persuader. Especially in an environment in which a significant group of people in society has doubts about their original belief systems there are opportunities for politicians to respond to this uncertainty. General latent feelings of anxiety, discomfort and insecurity, which can be present at these particular moments in time, often lead to a hunger for strong leadership, but also soothing and comfortable rhetoric (e.g. Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000; Mény and Surel, 2002a; Abts, 2004; Albertazzi, 2007; Kalkhoven, 2013b). Theoretically, many of these conditions apply in favour of the ‘style’ of populist leaders.

Faced with a revival of so-called ‘new populist parties’, the Western European political landscape has changed in the last decade (e.g. Taggart, 1995, 2000; Mény and Surel, 2002; Mudde, 2004, 2013, 2014; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). In (contemporary) times of economic and cultural crisis, populist party leaders seem to offer feasible and attractive solutions for the external and internal threats, such as the European Union, the incumbent elite, and immigrants, that are being associated with these crises. However, populism is an ambiguous concept, which causes many difficulties in doing empirical research of ‘populist characteristics’ (such as populist rhetoric).

The often vague notion of the concept of populism (e.g. Taggart, 2000; Mudde, 2004) asks first for an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon, which will be done in Chapter 6 (“Populist ideological stances in Western Europe”). The first objective of this chapter is to make a theoretical clarification of the populist ideology. Additionally, both the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) are especially interesting cases regarding the rise and success of populist parties in the last decade. Chapter 6 is therefore also dedicated to the exploration of populism as a political phenomenon in these countries. Although populism has been studied in both contexts before (e.g. Jagers, 2006; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Simon-Vandenberg, 2008; Pauwels, 2010, 2011; Zijderfeld, 2009; Vossen, 2010, 2011; Bos et al., 2013), the examination of the real populist ideology in

comparison to other parties in their own political realms, as well as in comparison to other *populist* parties in Western Europe is an addition to the existing literature.

The (relatively) recent rise of radical political parties in especially Western Europe makes it interesting to investigate whether there is a difference in rhetoric between extreme or radical politicians and the so-called ‘mainstream’ political parties. One of those successful populist leaders is the Dutch politician Geert Wilders, and his Party of Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV). Due to his strong statements, his controversial attitude and aberrant political style Wilders has changed the political landscape in the Netherlands within only a few years. Nevertheless, this successful ‘phenomenon’ is still hard to capture in the scientific world. The first problem is the existing discord whether we should perceive him as a populist or as a politician from an extreme right signature. Secondly, in this dissertation we examine political rhetoric, which is a feature that is often specifically attributed to the populist appearance, but is still above all a theoretical proposal. It is argued that the use of political rhetoric can be utterly beneficial in the political context where “the majority of the people is often unsure or uncommitted on the detailed content of [political] policy. They respond more effectively to messages that explain proposed actions with reference to [personal] familiar experiences” (Charteris-Black, 2005, p. 10). It is assumed that arousal of stronger and (more) negative emotions, such as anxiety or fear, have more sustainable persuasive effects (e.g. Marcus, 2003). In two empirical case studies, we make a contribution to the existing literature on populism by analysing rhetoric in populist language in the Netherlands. Chapter 7 presents an examination of the content (thematically) and metaphorical style by Geert Wilders, while the study in Chapter 8 analyses the use of rhetorical exaggeration by the populist party PVV.

Methodological contribution

Political language and rhetoric are subjects of scientific research within a very long tradition. Usually this area of study is anchored in the disciplines of linguistics, philosophy and social psychology, e.g. in terms of the impact of language and ideology, discourse analysis, cognitive and discursive approaches of argumentation and persuasion, and so forth (e.g. in Bull, 2003; Condor et al., 2013). It is however less common to analyse

the purely rhetorical character of language, especially on a large scale. Additionally, this dissertation contains newly developed methodology of analysis in fields of study that are as yet rather neglected or undiscovered. The examination of hyperbole as a political rhetorical element is, to my knowledge, unique in its kind. Other fields in this thesis, such as the rhetoric of populism/populist leaders, are described considerably more extensive but mostly from a different perspective. As I will show throughout the chapters, these studies are almost exclusively qualitative approaches. This dissertation combines a qualitative and a quantitative approach in the analysis of rhetorical variables.

As is elaborated more profoundly in Chapter 2, the multi-methodological combination of quantitative and qualitative research is a choice by design. Qualitative approaches have mainly established what characteristics can be found in political language and rhetoric. These are valuable contribution, and this line of research can still be extended with regards to specific and different contexts, circumstances, and (other) variable factors. Yet, the addition of quantitative analysis allows for a broader understanding of trends and characteristics in the use of language and rhetoric in politics, as it enables one to make *comparative* conclusions between variable subjects.

The significance of the methodological contribution of this dissertation lies, to my belief, in the combination of different and new methodologies to analyse particular rhetorical figures. The different studies not only analyse (to) what (extent) differences appear between political actors but there is also a recurring focus on why the use of rhetoric differs – and especially in which circumstances. Importantly, the data that are used makes this dissertation an examination of current and real-life political realms. The research is also multidisciplinary, since the studies are situated in the interdisciplinary fields of linguistics, political science, and communication studies, as well as political, social and cognitive psychology.

HOW TO READ THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation is essentially a collection of nine compiled chapters, including six empirical studies, assembled into one more or less coherent work. The first part (**Chapter 1: An Introduction**) is an introduction to the main topic of this thesis. What follows in this section is a short description of the content of the different studies and how one should read this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Methodology Explained is dedicated to the research design and methodologies that are used in the empirical chapters of the dissertation. The empirical research part, **Chapters 3 to 8** are empirical articles that have been published, or are submitted for publication, in scientific journals or as book chapters. Each of these following chapters is more or less integrally incorporated, which means that each article still has its own research question, theoretical introduction, method section and discussion, and can therefore be read individually. The consequence, however, is that the empirical studies (Chapters 3-8) all deal with a diversity of methods – mostly specifically designed earlier for the type of research that is used (i.e. *Metaphor Power Index*, *Integrative Complexity theory*), and sometimes newly developed (i.e. *Hyperbole-ratio* and *Hyperbole-value*) – for the analysis of the discussed rhetorical variables. In most published scientific articles there is often limited space to elaborate on the operationalization and methodology of the analysis. In Chapter 2, we therefore go more deeply into these matters.

The empirical studies mainly address two major pillars, namely political rhetoric and populism (and the relationship between one another). The studies regarding rhetoric deal with the sub-topics: crisis rhetoric, the use of metaphor as rhetorical figure, rhetorical exaggeration in political language, and the (either) simplification of political language. In the final part of this dissertation (**Chapter 9: Conclusion and Discussion**) a general conclusion and reflection on the topics of rhetoric and populism are given.

A matter of context

This dissertation departs from the theoretical assumption that a difference in the level of rhetoric use exists between political actors in the political contexts of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). Theoretically there is a variance between high and low degrees of rhetoric use, which is the difference between what we call content-oriented (or non-rhetorical) language and rhetoric-oriented language⁶, depending on certain independent variables (e.g. Lasswel, 1949; Windt and Ingold, 1987; De Landtsheer, 2009). What explains rhetorical differences between political parties? We can distinguish various context variables that can serve as factors that explain variance between subjects. *External circumstances* are context factors that are *situational* and *extraneous*, i.e. conditions that are situated outside the own sphere of influence. Specific political circumstances such as (political or economic) crisis, war and other crisis-like circumstances, such as elections can influence the (shift in) use of rhetoric. *Internal circumstances* are context factors that are situated inside the sphere of individual influence. In contrast to situational conditions, these internal circumstances are characteristics of politicians or their political party. In most of the empirical studies throughout this dissertation we distinguish factors such as party ideology, or place on the political spectrum, and the party and politician's role in the political context (e.g. opposition versus government, leaders versus non-leaders).

The rhetoric of crisis communication

In a first exploratory research (**Chapter 3: The smell of crisis**) we examine the differences in communication style and rhetoric in different external circumstances, depending on the presence or absence of *psychological stress*. The level of psychological stress in politics, according to common theories, increases in situations of political crisis and 'crisis-like' circumstances, such as in times of elections. Additionally, the study differentiates crisis communication style between different political parties in the Flemish parliament in Belgium. We theorize that non-crisis rhetoric is characterized by expressive, cognitive and content-oriented discourse, whereas in times of (approaching) crisis the rhetoric shifts towards more impressive, emotive and audience-oriented communication. Changes in crisis communication style are measured by implementing the methods of the *Crisis Communication Combination (CCC) theory* (De Landtsheer

and De Vrij, 2004; De Landtsheer, 2007), which relies on three main variables to assess the changes in communication style: metaphor power, the use of modal verbs and integrative complexity. The study contains two kinds of 'crisis': the first case is based on two crisis cases in Flemish politics, in the second case we analyse changes in crisis rhetoric between elections and non-election periods. The study suggests that not only external circumstances influence differences in crisis communication. It seems assumable that rhetorical differences between politicians or political parties can be found based on other grounds. This induced us to investigate the factors of what we called internal circumstances, such as the role that parties have in parliament, but also inherent party differences what we have called 'ideological' differences (see also Figure 1.1).

Rhetorical differences in parliamentary language

In the next studies we examine particular rhetorical elements in the every-day political language used in parliament. We start with the style figure of rhetorical exaggeration also known as *hyperbole*. The main objective of the first study (**Chapter 4: The use of hyperbole in political language**) is to test a newly developed methodological framework of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the style figure of hyperbole, and whether ideological differences (differences between political parties) in hyperbole use can be found. The parliamentary language in Flanders is taken as a contemporary case in order to find out how and to what extent hyperbolic language can be detected in current political rhetoric and what differences in hyperbole use between distinguished parties (i.e. ideologies) exist.

Additionally, we aim to establish a connection between the rhetorical use of language and the cognitive structure of language, as we try to examine the relation between rhetorical exaggeration and simplification in political rhetoric. **Chapter 5: 'Politics, it has never been so simple'** offers an empirical analysis of the degrees of integrative complexity (e.g. Suedfeld, 2010) and the involvement of hyperbole in the general political communication in parliament in the political case the Netherlands. It is expected that exaggeration as a rhetorical figure is closely correlated to integrative complexity. Additionally, we hypothesize that whereas levels of complexity increase among politicians who are involved in policy and governmental matters, levels of non-

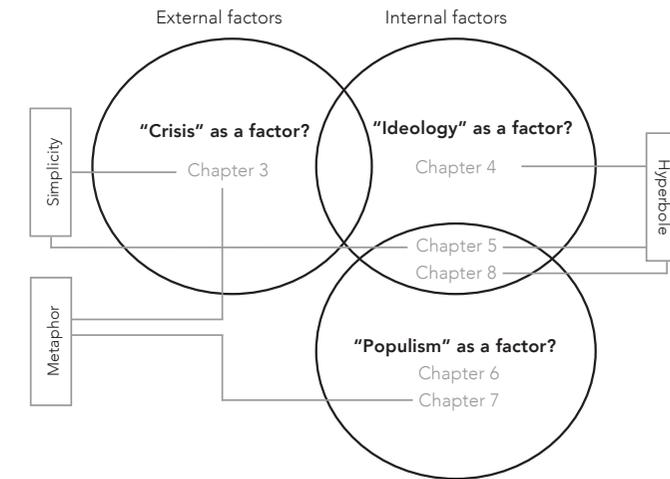
complex language can be found among parties without legislative obligations.

Populist rhetoric?

The use of rhetorical-oriented language (or terminology of similar kind) is often especially attributed to radical and populist politicians (e.g. Bonnafous, 1998; Abts, 2004; Albertazzi, 2007; Bos et al., 2013). The rhetoric of populism is an interesting path for further investigation. However, a first (and probably main) problem lies in defining the phenomenon ‘populism’. In an in-depth study (**Chapter 6: Populist ideological stances in Western Europe**) I therefore first explore the concepts of populism and ideology more extensively, and examine the presence of populism in the political contexts of Flanders and the Netherlands. The empirical part presents an ideological classification of the different political parties not only in both the Flanders and Dutch contexts, but also in comparison to other populist(-like) parties in Western Europe. However, I will argue that it is also a populist strategy that is reflected in the political rhetoric of populist politicians. In two empirical case studies we test the specific use of rhetoric by a prominent populist party and its leader in the Netherlands.

The first study (**Chapter 7: The imagery of Geert Wilders**) examines the language of the popular politician Geert Wilders more profoundly based on a thematic content analysis and his metaphoric style according to the method of metaphor power. The *Metaphor Power Index*, a systematic content analysis of metaphor with both quantitative and qualitative aspects (e.g. De Landsheer, 2015), traces the power of the use of the style figure ‘metaphor’. However, it would not be accurate to conclude that this metaphoric analysis provides us with a complete or determined picture of populist nor general political style or discourse. The metaphor is only one, although a very important, indicator in a series of different rhetorical features. Taking more, deviant rhetorical devices into account seems like a logical next step. Besides, it would be interesting to investigate in further research whether and where the populist right-wing political rhetoric in cases like Geert Wilders differ from other political discourses. **Chapter 8: “A piece of trash of the worst cabinet ever”** builds on the examination of hyperbole use in parliament, but from a different perspective, as it elaborates on the exaggeration in political language in the Dutch context, and focuses specifically on the deviant hyperbolic language of the populist leader Geert Wilders and his party PVV.

Figure 1.1: Categorization of chapters based on factors influencing differences in political rhetoric



Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands as cases of research

In this study, the cases that are examined are the political realms of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). Usually, concerning the case of Flanders, in this dissertation the focus is exclusively on the Flemish context, i.e. the Dutch-speaking, northern ‘half’ of Belgium^{vi}. Henceforth, the Belgian context will normally be denoted as ‘Flanders (Belgium)’ or just ‘Flanders’ (adjective: ‘Flemish’), except when something explicitly applies for the country as a whole (i.e. ‘Belgium’, adjective: ‘Belgian’). Although it excludes Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium, Flanders on its own is an interesting case for political research with its own Flemish government and parliament (see especially Chapter 3 for further information on the complex political situation in Belgium). Flanders is, more than any other ‘country’, closely related to the Netherlands (adjective: ‘Dutch’, similar to name of the language and its people). Less than two centuries ago the two still formed one country, which reflects in shared cultural and societal characteristics, and above all in the shared (Dutch) language that the inhabitants speak.

Although Belgium (11.3m inhabitants in 2015, of which 6.4m lives in Flanders) and the Netherlands (16.9m inhabitants in 2015) are relatively small players in the world's political arena, both Belgium and the Netherlands are interesting cases for political research. Both countries have substantial similarities when it comes to politics. Both cases are parliamentary democracies, based on multiparty systems and coalition governments. In present day, both party landscapes are highly fragmented, mainly due to (a relatively) recent *depillarization*: the motion in which influence of and support for traditional ideological or religious segments (or 'pillars') declined (even to an absolute minimum), and the related (ideological) political alienation and fluctuation that is left of it (see e.g. Jones, 2006; Lucardie, 2008). The political landscapes of both Flanders and the Netherlands are not only linguistically and culturally very similar, but ideologically as well. Almost every party in one context has an equivalent in the other context (see appendix A for a full overview of the political landscapes and their political parties in both the Netherlands and Flanders). Both countries also face the rise and popularity of political radicalism and/or populism, especially on the right side of the political spectrum (more on this in Chapter 6).

In most research that involves study of language, a perfect knowledge of the language and culture are primary conditions. Especially when the nature of language at a latent level (e.g. meaning through language) is analysed, as in the case with rhetoric. Hence, we focus on the Flemish and the Dutch political cases because of the advantageous conditions that come with linguistic study in the native language, and the researcher's familiarity with both regions. It is not the main aim to compare both cases – in all studies, except for Chapter 6, only one case (either Flanders or the Netherlands) is examined. However, because of the political, cultural and linguistic similarities of both cases, in the conclusion (Chapter 9) I will touch upon comparisons between both cases.

NOTES

- i See e.g. Oxford Online Dictionary at <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/rhetorical-question?q=rhetorical+question>
- ii Three-part list, puzzle-solution formats and rhetorical questions are well-known examples of rhetorical schemes (see e.g. Atkinson, 1984, 2004).
- iii In classical work rhetoric was, however, ascribed to different spheres in life (or purposes for the use of rhetoric). Aristotle distinguished between three forms of spheres in which rhetoric was used. Besides the political oratory (deliberative rhetoric), he described judicial (or forensic) rhetoric, as practiced in law, and epideictic (or ceremonial) rhetoric as used in celebration and praise (Billig, 2003; Condor et al., 2013).
- iv The linguistic concepts of (political) communication, language, speech, discourse, and rhetoric are often mixed up and interchangeably used in political contexts (e.g. by politicians, journalists, officials, and even scientists) (De Landtsheer, 1998a). Although they are very closely related to each other – most of them have shared parts or can be perceived as a subdivision of the other – it is useful to distinguish between the different terms. Whereas communication covers all processes of message transaction in a broad sense, language – or the transmission of encoded symbols – is the most important “vehicle” to accomplish that transaction. Although language normally refers to verbal symbols, written or spoken utterances (i.e. words), we also distinguish non-verbal communication (e.g. ‘body-language’). ‘Speech’, in a broad sense, can therefore rather be perceived as the “use of that vehicle” and covers “all methods by which people exchange symbols – written and spoken words, pictures, movements, gestures, mannerisms, and dress” (De Landtsheer, 1998a, p. 4) in given occasions. Discourse is often used in scientific literature to refer to political language, although a discourse can rather be described as a system of meaningfully related signs, often based on social convention. In fact, *a* language, in which (a chain of) symbols gain meaning by social convention, is a discourse as well. The system of related signs not only refers to the use of language, but also to structures of mental legacy or thoughts (this can also be perceived as ideologies) (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). In perspective of the scientific domain of linguistics we can make a distinction between language as the study of semantics (the meaning of words), as studies of pragmatism (how meaning is inferred from its context) and the interpretation and effects of language as the strategic use of language.
- v Non-rhetorical, content-oriented language is characterized as expressive, effect-modelled, varied, cognitive and (more) complex and is attributed to non-crisis situations, in spirit of cooperation and rational argumentation. Rhetorical language is considered to be audience-oriented, impressive, ‘emotive’ (i.e. tended to arouse emotion), and therefore used in times of crisis and (prior to) elections, has a spirit of *adversariality* and competition, focuses on persuasion through emotion and deception (it represents reality in different ways/spheres) (Lasswell, 1949; Windt and Ingold, 1987; Weinberger, 1995; Ilie, 2003).
- vi More information about Flanders e.g. <http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/ontdek-vlaanderen>.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY EXPLAINED

"A good coding system can act as a valuable aid to perception, not necessarily as a hindrance. It may enable the researcher to identify phenomena which might not be immediately obvious to the untrained observer."

Peter Bull
*'The Microanalysis of Political
Communication' (2003, p. 18)*

RESEARCH DESIGN

A common obstacle with published articles in academic journals is that there is usually more to explain than the limited space can offer. This means that studies need to be cut down in size often at the expense of useful, but not indispensable information. As a result, it is often the methodology that is given little attention. In this part I elaborate more extensively on the methodologies that have been used. Although some parts are more or less repetitions of the method sections in the different empirical chapters, this chapter tries to give a broader view on the research design, the methods that are used (and/or developed), the data that has been included and analysed, and the implementation and implication of the used methodology. This chapter consists of three parts: 1) a general explanation of using content analysis when studying political language and rhetoric; 2) elaboration on the used methods for analysing metaphor, hyperbole and simplification; and 3) in-depth focus on the operationalization, which includes data selection and data collection.

Content analysis in political rhetoric

Since the acknowledgments of figures of speech as important persuasive features, more scholars focus directly on the use and effects of rhetorical devices (e.g. Condor et al., 2013). Yet, the variety of studies show that there are many different rhetorical variables to examine and equally as much methods to study them. Different fields use rather specific – often qualitative – methods from different perspectives, such as the (critical) discourse analysis or critical linguistic study, structural, sociological or social-psychological approaches, or from a ‘microanalytic’ approach (see e.g. Bull, 2002, 2003). Through previous research we have notion of what characteristics political discourses can have, and what kind of rhetorical tools are used. However, this primarily provides a *qualitative* knowledge: we know *that* it is takes place, but not *to what extent*. That is why it would be useful to *quantify* the subject of research for two main reasons. Firstly, we gather information on the degree and proportionality of different rhetorical devices (which is a descriptive analysis), and secondly, the studies in this dissertation are also made comparative.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

Content analysis as research technique

Although a specific research design is developed for every rhetorical variable in this dissertation, as we will expound in the following sections, the general method of analysis in the empirical studies is *content analysis*. Content analysis is one of the most important and most used research techniques in communication and social sciences, when it comes to analysing text and speech, (mass) media content, educational material, literature and political communication (Krippendorff, 1989). Although rhetorical research (or analysis of rhetoric) not always turns to content analysis, but often rather to (critical) discourse analysis, it has become a common method as well. Content analysis is traditionally, although not exclusively, a quantitative research method, which goes back to the early pioneers of communication science such as Lasswell (1949) and Holsti (1969) who emphasized the importance of quantification of what, who, why and how messages communicate with what effect on whom, as research technique.

One of the earliest definitions of content analysis is “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Berelson’s definition, however, was later highly criticized because of its exclusive focus on quantification and manifest content (Van Cuilenburg et al., 1992). The most commonly accepted definition today, by Holsti, is much more applicable, as it seeks for latent patterns, possibly in connection to context, and is open to qualitative research: “Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). Holsti emphasised the importance of creativity in finding patterns that can be substract from and/or connect to real world data. Kolbe and Burnett (1991) added to the understandings of content analysis that “communications can also be analysed at many levels (image, word, roles, etc.), thereby creating a realm of research opportunities” (p. 234). Content analysis thus aims at the identification, differentiation and categorization of (recurring) elements in language and communication.

Issues of scientific justification

Nowadays quantitative content analysis often exceeds the aim of being purely descriptive, i.e. to describe the surface content of communication alone (as it used to be according to e.g. Berelson, 1952), and is in the spirit of Holsti (1969) rather used to make inferences (interpretations) about constructs. That is also the case in this dissertation. Validity of measurement¹ is (therefore) a requirement in content analysis (Rourke and Anderson, 2004) – as is the case in most methods – and consequently an important issue to consider in further detail.

Purely qualitative techniques are sometimes criticized for the subjective perspective of reading that lead to favourable outcomes, whereas especially quantitative content analysis “assures not only that all units of analysis receive equal treatment, whether they are entered at the beginning or at the end of an analysis but also that the process is objective in that it does not matter who performs the analysis or where or when” (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 404). Indeed, the advantage of quantitative methods in social and language studies is that it allows us to reduce observed behaviour to frequencies or rates of occurrence (categorization), therefore objective comparison between subjects is possible. This means that we (can) compare the specific use of rhetoric within distinguished independent variables on the same measurement scales. To come to that we made use of validated coding systems, or developed our own method of analysis in case of absence of an applicable coding system. “A good coding system can act as a valuable aid to perception, not necessarily as a hindrance. It may enable the researcher to identify phenomena which might not be immediately obvious to the untrained observer” (Bull, 2003, p. 18). At the same time, advocates of qualitative research remark that quantitative observations always start at a chosen point – according to the perception of the researcher of social phenomena – what also causes certain subjectivity (e.g. Shapiro, 1981). To count the occurrence of a phenomenon you need to determine what you consider as *the* phenomenon entirely. This step is often omitted in quantitative research, and if it is taken, the research is not completely ‘objective’. The norms and values of the researcher are also factors that influences quantitative results (Van Cuilenburg et al., 1992).

Moreover, the methodologies used for the different rhetorical variables show that analysis of rhetoric is often more than (only) a frequency analysis. As Krippendorff

(1989) argues, quantification of findings in content discourages the analysis of unique communications and favours “the use of data in contexts that entail stable and unambiguous interpretations and leaves little room for those whose meanings evolve in the process of communication and in ways characteristic of the different communicators or social groups involved” (p. 407), whereas such ambiguities happen frequently in political discourses (Krippendorff, 1989). Besides, problems that occur with prearranged coding systems, such as in CMC (computer-mediated communication) studies, are that data is often artificial (which is regularly the case in experiments) and that coding systems often lead to the reduction and distortion of data into perceived categories (Bull, 2003). In other words, there is a danger that findings are not generalizable beyond the observed data, which lead to low degrees of (ecological) validity. This can be problematic, because we could ignore much of the richness and uniqueness that is covert in the data. Therefore, first of all, we made this dissertation a naturalistic observation, i.e. we make use of real-life data, which ensures ecological validity. Secondly, we tried to make this dissertation multi-methodological: in every analysis in this dissertation a qualitative assessment is included as well, as the qualitative part often provides more insights in (recurring) patterns and other characteristics of rhetorical language in politics. The qualitative content analyses are meant as an addition to the statistically observed outcomes, not to make generalizable interpretations, but to point out salient and deflecting findings or trends. Thirdly, we argue that identification of the rhetorical variables (e.g. a rhetorical figure, or the level of complexity) exceeds the quantification by standard keywords alone, as we would exclude many rhetorical items and thus miss valuable information. Rhetorical variables are strongly context-dependent, variable (not always unilaterally applicable) and partly based on value judgements (such as intensity of metaphors). All this is very difficult to obtain through computer generated methods and therefore we came to the decision that manual (content) analysis is required (see also the discussion part of Chapter 9 where I elaborate further on this matter).

The other side of the coin here is that we may encounter a conflicting issue of objectivity (of data coding and analysis) and – consequently – reliability. In order to counterbalance these issues, several measures are made (as recommended in e.g. Lombard et al., 2002). Firstly, sustained and detailed attention was given to the development of the coding systems: each coding instrument has been pre-tested or has been validated in earlier research. Next, for each empirical study coders have been extensively instructed and

trained for making the coding, and *inter-rater agreement*ⁱⁱ tests have been executed. There are always multiple (more than one) coders involved in the data collection, including the presence of so-called ‘expert-coders’ (i.e. highly experienced coders who for example have been involved in the development of the coding technique). Besides, the total coding of each dataset has often taken place twice (or even three times). Finally, ambiguous, vague or indistinctive items, or items that resulted in disagreement in coding have always been excluded from the dataset.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Metaphor

Conceptualization of metaphor

Two empirical studies in this dissertation examine the particular use of metaphors, and the ‘power’ that metaphors can contain on an emotive and latent level of persuasion, as part of the crisis versus non-crisis communication rhetoric, and the specific differences between political parties (Chapter 3), and as part of the daily political rhetorical routine of one specific populist leader (Chapter 7).

The word ‘metaphor’, derived from the Greek word *metapherein*, means as much as ‘to transfer’ or ‘to carry beyond’. In the oldest, classical understanding, the metaphor is seen as a replacement or substitution of words, “a device for seeing something *in terms of something else*” (Burke, in Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004, p. 8). In other words, when using a metaphor one is transferring a word (or group of words), which is called the target, into a different word (or group of words), which is called the source. Whereas the target (A) is the actual subject of discussion, the source (B) is associated with a different sphere of life, and which is literally used to describe the subject (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004).

With the development of linguistic and semantic knowledge, analysis of metaphors shifted from classical philosophy and traditional semantics towards contemporary cognitive science and pragmatic linguistics, when the more implicit relationship between language and cognition (mental or psychological processes) was recognized (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004, p. 9). The meaning of metaphors is not only a simple semantic transfer of words (i.e. ‘just’ a comparison), nor only syntactically determined (X equals Y), but acknowledges the syntagmatic relationship (the contiguity of words to each other) of a source and a target. In this view the two entities of the metaphor, the target (A) and source (B) are connected to each other and that is how the metaphor develops

significance. The interaction between (A) and (B) generates an entirely new meaning (C). The additional difference between its literal or figurative meaning depends on the novelty and the a-normality of verbal collocation. The use of a metaphor often causes a surprise, because of the fictional or rarity that occurs between (meaning of) source and target. The difference between literal and figurative implies therefore a distinction between frequency and rarity, rather than reality and fiction.

This understanding consequently leads to two assumptions. First of all this distinction implies a variety of strength and power, depending on the frequency on the one hand and a 'degree of rarity' on the other hand. Geertz (1973) argued that: "The power of a metaphor derives (...) from the interplay between the discordant meanings it symbolically coerces into a unitary conceptual framework and from the degree to which that coercion is successful in overcoming the psychic resistance this semantic tension inevitably generates in anyone in a position to perceive it" (quoted in Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004, p. 13). More frequently used metaphors are often ingrained in every-day language, where associated terms appear together relatively frequently. These metaphors, which are called ghost (or dead) metaphors, are generally used, whereas their implicit or original separate meaning is lost in the regularity of its use. Older metaphors, which are entwined in our daily language, are comfortable 'fits', they join in with heuristically habits and conventions, and may even be so accepted that they are no longer considered to be metaphors anymore. In general it is argued that more frequently used, close-to-reality and familiar metaphors (such as ghost or dead metaphors) are often hard to recognize, and consequently lose their immediate power to surprise, but derive their strength exactly from the frequency (its comfortable, unrecognizable and conventional nature) of use. Newer and more original metaphors with greater distance of experiences are more powerful, but are also more easily recognizable as being metaphors, due to an unexpected, surprising or even shock effect that they induce. Although these new, surprising metaphors are strong in their immediate effect, they are sometimes more difficult to understand because of the strange (or even absurd) looking comparison. In analysing the (power of) metaphor, one should look for both quantitative (frequencies) and qualitative (originality and content) variables.

Measuring metaphors

Metaphor Power Index

In order to detect (the power of) metaphors we make use of a method of analysis developed by De Landtsheer, called the Metaphor Power Index (De Landtsheer, 2015)ⁱⁱⁱ. The Metaphor Power Index (MPI) is a quantitative examination of the metaphorical power of a certain text or speech. A high metaphor index indicates a strong metaphorical text, which means that the communication is characterized by a strong persuasive effort, including a high amount of emotions that is directly aimed at connection with the public. A low index value refers to a weak metaphorical style, in which persuasion (if at all) occurs rather through logical argumentation, than through the emotional effects of rhetoric (De Landtsheer, 2015). The MPI is based on three variables, which all contribute to the degree of metaphor power and therefore are all of importance to the rhetorical effect that metaphors can possess. In order to analyse the power of metaphors we measure the metaphor frequency (MF), the intensity (MI) and the content of the metaphor (MC).

To calculate the frequency of metaphors (MF) it is necessary to define a metaphor in order to detect one. As described earlier, we can define a metaphor as a word or group of words that causes an interaction between the actual subject of discussion and the figurative source that is used to literally describe the subject from a different sphere of life – an alien name, and which creates a new meaning (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004). An example of a well-known metaphor is the portrayal of the political realm as a game, in which winning and losing is central. The metaphorical construction of politics-as-game clearly refers to a different sphere of life – in this example to the sphere of sports, games or drama – instead of the actual subject of politics. The index of the frequency of metaphor use (MFI) shows the frequency of the number of metaphors per 100 words in a certain (written) text, in which the total number (n) of metaphors (me) is divided by the total number of words (wo) in the text (e.g. De Landtsheer, 2015). The more metaphors are used, the higher the MF-index.

$$\sum \text{MFI} = \frac{n(me)}{n(wo)} \times 100$$

The intensity variable (MI) represents the degree in which the ‘different sphere of life’ (the referent or source) still exists in (the new meaning of) the metaphor. A metaphorical expression can either have a strong or weak connotation with the metaphor’s original source. This variable deals with the novelty and originality of character of the metaphor, as new and surprising metaphors contain stronger rhetorical effects (e.g. De Landtsheer, 2015). The use of more intense, creative and/or new metaphors leads to higher MI-values at the scale of intensity. Hence metaphors that are embedded in our daily life speech lead to a lower MI-index (MII), due to their commonness and very weak source references (there is little connection between target and original source). Whereas weak intensity refers to generally known and familiar or even dead metaphors, strong intensive metaphors are utterly original and will surprise the audience, and usually evoke powerful images among the audience. In our example of politics-as-game, we could for instance metaphorically refer to ‘the political game’ as either A) a game, or B) a joust. The reference of the same *source* (the political debate) does have the same *target* (games), however, the degree of reference – and therefore the intensity – is bigger in the second example (the joust metaphor) than in the first (the game metaphor), because the imagery is more vivid and original. In order to distinguish this difference, the metaphor intensity is taken into account and is measured on a three-stage scale (classified in 1: weak (w) – 2: average (a) – 3: strong (s), respectively with their values 1, 2, 3.

$$\sum \text{ MII} = \frac{1w + 2a + 3s}{n(\text{me})}$$

The content variable (MC) ranks content categories in ascending degrees based on their emotional potential and to what extent they confirm or disturb the existing order in life. Low categorical degrees refer to metaphorical language that mostly confirms reality and provide therefore a feeling of comfort rather than arouse ‘negative’ emotions, whereas high categorical values rather disturb the idea of reality and create therefore emotional tension, such as feelings of anxiety, aversion or unrest. People can benefit from this in either way, as some situations ask for reassurance, whereas sometimes a raised level of social stress (and the arousing of anxiety for instance) is more beneficial. A politician could for example visualize an economy measure either as a ‘heavy rain that is pouring down’ (reference to nature) or as a ‘disease that is paralyzing’ (medical

reference). Although both metaphors represent unpleasant prospects, the first depiction almost euphemistically offers space to control the situation, for instance by taking early measures (as one normally is able to take precautions to heavy rain in real life). The second metaphor does not offer that solution, and thus evokes a much stronger/powerful emotive connotation, as the medical reference implies that one cannot control this situation, being at the mercy of powers outside one’s own reach.

This empirical validated content scale (e.g. De Landtsheer, 2009, 2015) contains six ascending categories, of which will be illustrated with an (random) example from the research sample:

- 1) *Popular or everyday-life metaphors (P)*. These metaphors serve the basic function of making the abstract tangible and comprehensible to a large audience. Example: “When you state that community spirit belongs to society, than that’s the same as thinking back nostalgically to the [musty] smell of sprouts of the 50s” (Jan Marijnissen, *SP*, in the Dutch Parliament, 09/19/2007).
- 2) *Nature metaphors (N)*. This kind of metaphors goes in two ways. The natural order can be confirmed and lead to the suggestion of citizen’s control over the environment, but it can also express the idea of lack of control – where nature goes its own way. In references to flora and fauna we witness both wild and domestic animals for instance. Example: “All over the world the sun is shining, however, in the Netherlands the Cabinet manages above all to produce dark clouds” (Geert Wilders, *PVV*, in Dutch Parliament, 09/19/2007).
- 3) *Technical (navigation, construction, political and other ‘sophisticated’) metaphors (T)*. This category refers to e.g. technical instruments, transport, architecture, and is used as a means to simplify complex (political) processes. However, this imagery has also an ambivalent character, as there is bias in the implication of controlling complexity on the one hand, and losing control over the surroundings (to machinery for instance). Metaphors of architecture advance the discussion, whereas mechanical metaphors usually expose the people’s lack of control. Example: “As such we seem to miss the train of the future” (Mieke Vogels, *Groen*, in Flemish Parliament, 11/22/2006).

- 4) *Violence* (and disaster) metaphors (*V*). This category refers to negative emotions, such as fear, despair and aggression. However, it allows citizens to be in control to some extent. Example: “You gave us an avalanche of facts and statistics” (Sven Gatz, *Open VLD*, in Flemish Parliament, 09/30/2009).
- 5) *Drama* (sports, games, film, history and biblical) metaphors (*D*). This category about ‘winning’ and ‘losing’, which provides a very unrealistic image of reality, appeals to many people, because of its perceived harmlessness and the possibility to escape reality for some moments. Example: “Don’t you see that we are losing the battle?” (Alexander Pechtold, *D66*, in Dutch Parliament, 09/26/2006).
- 6) *Body* (disease, medical and death) metaphors (*B*). This last category, referring to the human body, medical operation, kind of diseases and disorder, and (everything that concerns) death, is attributed the highest power. It concerns very emotional metaphors that leave the suggestion that every control is lost, and that there is a fundamental need for an external power (a ‘doctor’) who can restore or cure the current situation. Example: “What we witness today eventually, is the death agony of the terminally ill patient [that is] Belgium” (Filip De Winter, *Vlaams Belang*, in Flemish Parliament, 09/10/2007).

The categories in the metaphor content index (MCI) are placed on a scale from 1 to 6, in which the metaphors that arouse stronger emotions (categories 4-6: ‘violence’, ‘drama’ and ‘body’ metaphors, and which receive corresponding values) lead to high MCI values. The lower categories (1-3: ‘popular’, ‘nature’ and ‘technical’ metaphors, also with their corresponding values 1, 2 and 3) lead to low MCI values. MCI is calculated by dividing the sum of the used categories in text, in which every category is given a corresponding factor score, by the total number of metaphors in text. In sum:

$$\sum \text{MCI} = \frac{1P + 2N + 3T + 4V + 5D + 6B}{n(\text{me})}$$

The calculation of the Metaphor Power Index (MPI) is the result of multiplying the metaphor frequency index (MFI), the intensity index (MII) and the content index (MCI):

$$\sum \text{MPI} = \text{MFI} \times \text{MII} \times \text{MCI}$$

Procedure of measuring metaphor power

Metaphor power analysis can be done in all sorts of written and spoken text (De Landtsheer, 2009). Normally, the text that is to be observed is divided into text samples that can be used for a systematic examination and coding of the three separate variables (frequency, intensity and content). The metaphor content analysis is based on the use of a coding scheme (see Appendix C: Table C.2) in which for each text sample the number of metaphors, and for each metaphor the intensity and content variable, is designated. In order to code the frequency of metaphor use (MF) we use the definition of metaphor as stated earlier. Although plain non-figurative comparison (X is like Y) is excluded from this definition, there are many related rhetorical figures, such as parables and analogies^{iv}, metonymy and synecdoche^v, and even hyperboles^{vi} (as we also argue later) that can be metaphorical as well. For each text sample the total number of metaphors is counted, whereby it is noted that repetition of the same metaphor or accumulation of different metaphors shall always be counted as separate items (De Landtsheer, 2009), and calculated into the total MFI.

The intensity (MII) and content (MCI) variables are categorical scoring items (scales of respectively 1-3 and 1-6). Although these variables are usually logically assignable, they are more depending on interpretative inference of the coder and therefore it is important that coders are well informed and trained, and obtain experience in metaphorical language and the coding of it. All metaphor analyses in the studies in this dissertation are executed by multiple (experienced) coders, including the supervision of the founder of the metaphor power index. Prior to the analyses, an intensive training program and a series of different pre-test were conducted in order to test the internal validity and inter-rater reliability. After the series of pre-testing a valid *inter-rater agreement* is observed ($\kappa > .80$). Additionally, further directions emphasize the importance that cases of doubt or ambiguity should be removed from the analysis.

Hyperbole

Conceptualizing rhetorical exaggeration

The term *hyperbole* is derived from the Greek words *hyper* ('over') and *ballein* ('throwing') literally meaning 'throwing beyond'^{vii}, thus an intensification of something is implied. It is very common to express something in bigger terms than reality represents, often to make a contribution more vivid, to add a humorous effect or to emphasize a certain point (see e.g. Roberts and Kreuz, 1994). People are, through convention and experience, mostly perfectly capable of sensing what is meant hyperbolic and what is not. And although it is almost tangible that political language is full with overstatement and exaggeration, it seems rather challenging to systematically identify hyperbole in text and speech (especially in a political context). However, through empirical studies in Chapter 4, 5 and 8 in this dissertation we attempt to bridge that gap in the academic literature, and in this section we elaborate further on the establishment of our methodology that we use in these studies.

Identification of hyperbole

As I argued, upon today only a few empirical studies provide methodology to identify and analyse hyperbole in spoken or written text. Most of the studies that aim or include hyperbole as an object of analysis make use of listed standard keywords that signify different hyperboles. Keywords of 'extreme case formulation' (ECF) play an important role, because they often reveal the indication of the exaggerated, or in other words: the extremity of reality, which is either an enlargement (or *auxesis*) or a reduction (or *meiosis* in classical rhetorical terms^{viii}). ECF's are semantic classification of extremity, such as everything or nothing, always or never, best or worst, most or least. Cano Mora (2009) provides a framework of multiple keywords that not only helps to indicate exaggeration in discourse, but also categories them into different semantic groups. According to Cano Mora, there are three semantic fields (shared components of similar semantic ideas or meanings e.g. synonymy) in which hyperbole can occur, divided into different subfield. The first semantic field, the field of *purity* contains four subfields, namely (1) the idea of completeness and absoluteness, (2) the idea of universality or non-exceptionality, (3) the idea of non-existence and nullity, and (4) the idea of veracity (see Table 2.1).

Moreover, she adds a semantic field of *quantity*, which involves numbers and (other) standardized measure units, such as time measures, length or linear measures, and all other numerical expressions (i.e. numbers) as well as words that imply a certain quantity (i.e. amounts). Finally, the author acknowledges the semantic field of *magnitude*, which is either the idea of greatness or the idea of smallness expressed in natural words as opposed to numerical expression (Cano Mora, 2009, pp. 30-31).

Table 2.1: Semantic fields and subfields of hyperbole, divided by a quantitative and evaluative framework (source: Cano Mora, 2009, pp. 29-31)

Quantitative framework	Examples
Purity	
Completeness, absoluteness	<i>completely, absolute, absolutely, total, totally, entirely, full, fully, whole, sheer, pure</i>
Universality, non-exceptionality	<i>all, always, everywhere, throughout the world, everybody, everybody else, every one, every, everything, anything</i>
Non-existence, nullity	<i>no, no one, no one else, nobody, nothing, nothing else, not any, not anything, never, not at all</i>
Veracity	<i>literally, beyond any doubt, definitely</i>
Numbers, quantity, measure	
Time measure	<i>ten times, a second, a minute, ten minutes, an hour, the evening, two days, the weekend, a week, six months, months and months and months, ages, ages and ages and ages</i>
Long/linear measure	<i>two inches, an inch</i>
Numerical expression	<i>two thousand, four thousand, not half as much, half a million, one and a half million, three hundred million</i>
Quantity words, accumulation	<i>a load, loads of, a pile of, compost heap, lots</i>

Magnitude

Greatness	<i>mammoth, dinosaurs, like a horse's nose bag, riding jodhpurs, great big, massive, vast, huge, enormous (amount of), tremendous (amount of), immensely (size); moustache, beard, mushrooming, rolling in, coining money (superabundance); day in, day out, forever, lifelong, like a lifetime (duration); most, the most, utmost, infinitely, extremely (degree, limit); remotely (distance)</i>
Smallness	<i>a flea on a dog's back, little tiny, tiny, minuscule, box room (size); next to (distance), instantly (duration); don't move (motion)</i>

Evaluative framework	Examples
Positive evaluation	
Life, heaven	<i>revived, reviving, vital, paradise</i>
Perfection, magnificence	<i>ideal, excellent, great, wonderful</i>
Splendor, beauty	<i>lovely, gorgeous, precious, brilliant</i>
Impact/singularity	
Specialty, notability, astonishment	<i>smashing, amazed, astonish, shock, shocked, thrilled, unbelievable, couldn't believe, extraordinary, another world, impressive</i>
Negative evaluation	
Chaos, disorder	<i>mess, mess up, illegible</i>
Shrillness, pungency	<i>scream, squeal</i>
Badness, evil	<i>worst, wicked, relentless, obnoxious</i>
Frightfulness	<i>horrible, terribly, terrible, an awful (lot of)</i>
Violence, destruction	<i>disaster, a recipe for disaster, disgrace, devastated, ruin, erupted, blasting away, thrown on the scrap heap</i>
Sorrow, pain	<i>pathetic, sickening, starve, starving, freezing, can't breathe, drained, (give me a) headache</i>
Deadliness, hell	<i>killing, dead, limbo, hell, a hell of</i>
Physical or physic abandonment, loss of control	<i>desperately, frantically, gets on your nerves, get out of me head, crazily, went haywire, mental health problems, in fits, crack me up, living on drugs, asleep, can't resist</i>

Although such a quantitative framework of keywords makes it easier to detect and recognize particular (recurring) hyperboles, it would lead to a limitation of the possible number and sorts of hyperboles that exist. Hyperbole, as many rhetorical figures, can appear in many different forms. In many cases hyperbole is wrongfully seen only as a synonym of ECF. According to Norrick (2004), ECF is a “subcategory of hyperbole” (p. 1728) as ECF “matches the typical apodictic [i.e. undeniable] tone of proverbs, while hyperbolic imagery fits the colorful character of proverbial phrases and idioms” (p. 1737). Whereas both ECF and hyperbole are non-literal exaggerated statements, hyperbole can also occur as non-extremities, metaphorical or idiomatic, and (therefore) not necessarily untruthful (as ECF is by definition).

Many rhetorical exaggerations are deeply rooted into our daily-life language, they have become so conventionalized that people are usually hardly aware of the fact that they are hyperboles. Nonetheless, in content analytical work they are relatively easy to designate. The expressions “he waited for *ages*” or “I’ll be there in a *second*” are for example exaggerated, but very common, time measurement to indicate respectively a very long and very short amount of time. Both are examples of (frequently used) hyperboles because they express an impossibility of action: it is clear that one is not literally capable of waiting for ages or moving oneself in only a second. However, the rhetorical ‘figure of speech’ is generally accepted. The same applies for a statement such as “I’m *dying* of laughter”, in which people will generally acknowledge that ‘dying to’ represents a very strong feeling or an eager desire, instead of the action of actual decease (see also McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 151). In this last example we can see that hyperbole and metaphor are closely related to each other, as both can co-exist in one singular expression (which is also the case with other related stylistic figures such as irony, humour, understatement, etc.).

The hyperbole acquires its meaning and relevance from its linguistic and social context, therefore, in order to define one, we needed to consider criteria that emphasizes or indicate the (degree of) deviation in respect to the standards that define the literal in its linguistic (surrounding words/sentences) or social (real world) contexts. Very useful is a study by McCarthy and Carter (2004) who provide a list of criteria that makes (quantitative) identification of hyperboles possible. The authors sum up eight basic

related conditions of which, as they decree, a text or talk must display at least three in order to determine hyperbole use in it (in McCarty and Carter, 2004, pp. 162-163):

- Disjunction with context: the speaker's utterance seems at odds with the general context.
- Shifts in footing: there is evidence (e.g. discourse marking) that a shift in footing is occurring to a conversational frame where impossible worlds or plainly counterfactual claims may appropriately occur.
- Counterfactuality not perceived as a lie: the listener accepts without challenge a statement which is obviously counterfactual.
- Impossible worlds: speaker and listener between them engage in the construction of fictitious worlds where impossible, exaggerated events take place.
- Listener take-up: the listener reacts with supportive behaviour such as laughter or assenting back-channel markers and/or contributes further to the counterfactuality, impossibility, contextual disjunction, etc.
- Extreme case formulations and intensification: the assertion is expressed in the most extreme way (e.g. adjectives such as endless, massive) and/or extreme intensifiers such as literally, nearly, totally are used. These are not necessarily counterfactuals or absurd worlds, as many may be heard as (semi-) conventional metaphors (e.g. someone being absolutely covered in mud/grease/etc).
- Syntactic support: syntactic devices (e.g. polysyndeton^x, as in loads and loads and loads, or complex modification such as really great big long pole) are used to underline the amplification of the expression.
- Relevant interpretability: the trope is interpretable as relevant to the speech act being performed, and is interpreted as figurative within its context, though there may also be evidence of literal interpretations being exploited for interactive/affective purposes.

The development of a new method

The combination of the determined semantic fields of hyperbolic keywords by Cano Mora (2009), together with the list of criteria by McCarthy and Carter (2004) gives us a useful starting point in order to detect hyperboles and distinguish hyperbolic from non-hyperbolic language, because it is more profound than the identification of standard keywords (such as ECF) alone. A hyperbole, or rhetorical exaggeration, is defined as an exaggerated form of phrasing in which words or clusters of words express a figurative, and/or an exceptional, extreme and often a false representation of reality, in which it is up to the receiver to distinguish between what is real and what is exaggerated or overstated (McCarthy and Carter, 2004; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010). The definition points out the importance of the receiver in 'accepting' the hyperbole in phrases, and several of the eight criteria seem to depend (mostly) on the receiver's response as well (e.g. shift in footing, listener take-up). However, it is our aim to develop a quantitative methodological instrument in order to detect hyperbole in real-life communication, objectively and systematically, but also at a distance, in a more generalizable and comparative way, which means that the instrument should be applicable for every sort of communication (debates, speeches, interviews, etc.). In many cases there is a lack of (access to the) receiver's response. Additionally, hyperbole is often strongly related to other figures of speech (these are mostly metaphorical in nature), but that in most studies these figurative exaggerations are overlooked and hyperbole is often seen as ECF only. We opt for inclusion of a second group of hyperboles: the (non-extreme) figurative enlargements. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a new methodology with quantifiable content analysis criteria. In order to accomplish this, we follow three relatively simple steps (derived from the criteria by McCarthy and Carter, 2004). The first step is to look for extreme case formulations, intensifiers, keywords and (other) syntactical support, for which the list of keywords by Cano Mora (2009) is particularly useful, but we also look for figurative (often metaphorical) intensifications. Step two is to test the ECF or figurative enlargements to the disjunction with the context and other criteria that still can be derived from the list of McCarthy and Carter's (2004) framework (counterfactuality, impossibility). The last step is a check-up of the relevant interpretability of the trope, which means that the utterance should make sense. We formulate three basic criteria to which a phrase can be classified as being hyperbolic:

- 1) A phrase or sentence contains (at least one) hyperbole as a rhetorical figure of speech in which reality is expressed in exaggerated or overstated form. This is often assignable due to the presence of ECF, and other syntactical support, but it can also be a figurative (metaphorical) exaggeration;
- 2) It has (as by definition) to be an extremity or enlargement (in stylistics also known as *auxesis*). The phrase is in a sense odd in its context (a disjunction), and/or there is an expression of unlikelihood or impossibility (counterfactuality), or the utterance is even simply untrue (thus false) (McCarthy and Carter, 2004);
- 3) There is an indication of 'realistic sense', which means that it is clear that the utterance is not meant as nonsense (e.g. rubbish, absurdism, or purposely lying).

Measuring hyperbole

The measurement of hyperbole, as pursued in this dissertation, will be illustrated by the following example derived from the Dutch politician Geert Wilders (from Chapter 5):

"Today we discuss the Budget [...], a piece of trash of the worst cabinet ever"^{1x}
(Geert Wilders, leader of the PVV, in Dutch Parliament on September 26, 2008).

What makes this sentence hyperbolic, and how do we code this kind of phrases? Table 2.2 shows the three steps that are processed in order to detect the hyperboles in this sentence. First of all, the phrase contains two extreme case formulations (ECF's) 'ever' and 'worst' that indicate an extremity or enlargement. The second hyperbole, 'A piece of trash', is rather a metaphorical exaggeration. Notice the fact that we count two separate hyperboles in one singular phrase: {a} 'a piece of trash', referring to the budget, and {b} 'the worst cabinet ever'. Cano Mora (2009) explains the identification of separate hyperboles by referring to hyperbolic items, rather than *a* hyperbolic utterance: "[b]y hyperbolic item I mean the minimal unit of sense or meaning, whether a word, phrase or expression, which per se, given the appropriate context, conveys an idea of excess or extremity. In turn, different hyperbolic items may co-occur within a single utterance and form hyperbolic clusters (e.g. lots of people have got nothing to do)" (2009, p. 28). Thus, although they coexist in only one sentence, different hyperbolic utterances (as well as repetition of the same hyperbole) should always be counted as individual (or separated) cases, as they express two different ideas that are overstated. This is, subsequently, a

matter of context: exaggeration {b} contains two ECF's ('worst' and 'ever') but the phrase only obtains its rhetorical exaggeration due to the sequence (and combination) of the words, and is therefore counted as one hyperbolic utterance (or item).

Secondly, speaking about the Budget in terms of 'a piece of trash' and the cabinet as 'the worst ever' are both enlargements and extremities of the reference, odd in the context of the political debate, factually very unlikely and could (or should) they be perceived as figuratively (although it could be possible that the phrase by politician Geert Wilders is proclaimed as being factual, neither of the statements are likely to be literally true). It is however probably well understandable what is meant by the politician, as the statement can make sense to the observer. Hence, when a coding of a (randomly) selected text is made, one segregates the text into segments (phrases or sentences) and distillates the different (clustered) hyperboles, asking oneself the question whether there is presence of an exaggeration (extremity, enlargement) either by the extreme formulation or through a figurative overstatement. In the example that is given, we count therefore two hyperboles (hyperbolic utterances) in a context of fourteen words (which gives a certain hyperbole ratio or density, as we will see later).

Table 2.2: Example of detecting hyperbole in text or speech based on the three major criteria.

Step	Criteria	Present?	Why?
1a	Extreme formulation	Yes	'Worst' and 'ever' are keywords of extreme case formulation
	Syntactic support	No	This often emerges in repetition or sequence of extreme formulations (e.g. 'millions and millions')
1b	Metaphorical/figurative	Yes	Referring to the Budget as 'a piece of trash' is rather figuratively, and can be perceived as a metaphor
2	Enlargement or extremity	Yes	Both expressions are extremities in normal discourse
2a	Disjunction w/ context	Yes	Both 'a piece of trash' and 'the worst cabinet ever' seem odd with the general context

2b	Counterfactual/ impossible/unlikely	Yes	The idea that the cabinet is 'the worst cabinet ever' seems factually incorrect (or at least very unlikely); similar for the representation of the Budget as 'a piece of trash'
3	Meaningful utterance	Yes	Both hyperbolic expressions are understandable (no nonsense): it is reasonably clear to the receiver what the sender means with them

NB: This coding scheme applies for the detection of two different hyperboles in one sentence

Two things should be taken into account here. First of all, in this example there are clues that indicate different types of hyperboles in the sentence. We thus can distinguish in different semantic subfields as we have seen. For example, the words 'worst' and 'ever' refer to what Cano Mora (2009) describes as the semantic subfield of magnitude (as it implies a greatness: there is no time-dimension possible outside the dimension of all-time). Secondly, it comes directly to mind that the hyperbolic phrase is particularly negative in nature. Apart from the identification of hyperboles alone, it would be interesting to see what kind of hyperboles are used (a qualitative assessment) and categorize them based on substantive criteria of (positive or negative) value.

Hyperbole value

Rhetorical figures regularly emphasize either a positive or negative evaluation of a situation (Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b). Colston and O'Brien (2000b) argue that a hyperbole is often a (very) negative evaluation of a (moderately) negative situation, however, if the literal situation is (moderately) positive evaluated than the exaggeration is inevitably positively expressed as well. Rhetorically speaking, it matters considerably how a certain situation is evaluated. Usually, negative evaluations express undesirable, unexpected and dangerous circumstances that subsequently can arouse 'negative emotions', such as anxiety, fear, anger or envy (Marcus, 2003). Positively expressed utterances, which are more desirable and expected, are therefore likely to arouse more 'positive feelings', such as happiness, relief, reassurance or satisfaction. Cano Mora (2009) emphasizes that, besides the objectively quantity or magnitude in excess of hyperboles, also the evaluation of the speaker's emotions and attitudes towards the object or situation, whether positive or negative, is important to examine. She provides us with a classification of hyperboles, based on certain major semantic subfields, into three

components: positive and negative evaluation, and what she calls the impact/singularity evaluation^{xi} (see Table 2.2). The positive hyperbolic evaluation conveys the speaker's approval, admiration or praise, and therefore expresses always certain semantic fields of kindness or gentleness, such as ideas of life and heaven (e.g. reviving, vital, paradise), ideas of perfection and magnificence (e.g. ideal, excellent, great, wonderful), or ideas of splendour and beauty (e.g. lovely, gorgeous, precious, brilliant) (Cano Mora, 2009, p. 29)^{xii}.

Negative hyperbole use expresses disapproval, criticism and condemnation. Cano Mora distinguishes eight different semantic subfields in the domain of negative hyperbolic evaluation, i.e. the idea of chaos and disorder (e.g. mess (up), illegible), the idea of shrillness and pungency (e.g. scream, squeal), the idea of badness and evil (e.g. worst, wicked, relentless, obnoxious), the idea of frightfulness (e.g. horrible, terrible, awful), the idea of violence and destruction (e.g. disaster, disgrace, devastated, ruin), the idea of sorrow or pain (e.g. pathetic, sickening, starving, freezing), the idea of deadlines and hell (e.g. killing, dead, hell), or the idea of physical or psychic abandonment and loss of control (e.g. desperately, frantically, something on one's nerves or in one's head, crazily) (2009, pp. 29-30).

Procedure of measuring hyperbole

The procedure of measuring hyperbole is in general similar to the measurement procedure of metaphor. With the aim of hyperbolic classification it is also necessary to examine the context of the utterance, rather than the utterance alone. The datasets that have been used in the studies consists of (randomly) selected contributions by different politicians in political debates. Each text sample is reduced to a consecutive text sample of about 1,000 words. Next, each text sample has been fragmented into segments (phrases or sentences). Following the criteria that are stated above, different (clustered) hyperboles are identified, counted and categorized. For the quantitative analysis we measure two variables: the quantity of hyperbole use (hyperbole frequency) and the either positive or negative evaluation of the hyperboles that have been used (hyperbole value). The hyperbole frequency is measured by conducting the average or ratio of hyperbole use (HB-ratio) in a certain text sample. The ratio is measured by calculating the number (n) of overstatements (HB) per 100 words (w).

$$\sum \text{HB-ratio} = \frac{n(\text{HB})}{n(\text{w})} \times 100$$

The either positive or negative evaluation of the hyperboles, the value of hyperbole (HB-value), is measured by calculating the ratio (or share) of negative and positive hyperboles in a text sample, divided by the total number of hyperboles in the text sample. When +1 is added to this outcome, scores are generated on a scale between 0 and 2, in which '0' is being completely positive, '1' is neutral (neither positive or negative) and '2' is being entirely negative. In sum:

$$\sum \text{HB-value} = \frac{n(\text{HB}_{\text{negative}}) - n(\text{HB}_{\text{positive}})}{\text{Total } n(\text{HB})} + 1$$

The quantitative coding has been tested and re-tested repeatedly. The initial database of text samples has been analysed according to a coding scheme (see Appendix C: Tables C.3 and C.4), after a series of pre-tests in order to test the validity and usefulness of the instrument regarding the quantitative identification and value scoring of hyperboles. The coding scheme contained an introduction and the definition of hyperbole as described above, a checklist for the three major criteria, divided into sub-criteria (see Table 2.2), and a list of keywords (according to Cano Mora, 2009; see Table 2.1) as a backup, and the occasion to classify the value of a discovered hyperbole as positive, negative or neutral. The *inter-rater reliability* indicated an increasing agreement (using Cohen's Kappa, to a maximum of $\kappa = .60$, after the series of pre- and post-tests, which can be seen as a moderate agreement according to Landis and Koch, 1977). The last stage of data collection was the re-coding analysis of the entire corpus, serving as a second opinion of wrongfully coded or missed hyperboles. The interpretation of hyperbolic categorization and content (the qualitative part) has been executed using in-depth analysis of the corpus material. Finally, if one was not certain whether something is meant hyperbolically or not, we followed the rule by McCarthy and Carter that "borderline cases occur which have to be excluded" (2004, p. 163). In Chapter 4 we elaborate more on signs of recurring elements in hyperbole identification.

Simplification

Integrative complexity theory

The method of integrative complexity (by Suedfeld and colleagues) is probably the most in-depth and widely-used scoring system for measuring cognitive complexity (Guttieri, Wallace and Suedfeld, 1995, p. 598; Conway et al., 2008). Integrative complexity (or I.C.) is a psychological construct that describes the elaboration and complexity of any given information and thought (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Thoemmes and Conway, 2007). Current complexity theories depart from the idea that an individual's cognitive ability of information processing (whether or not deliberately) defines the degree of integrative complexity. The degree of complexity is derived from a one-dimensional scale of two gradual indicators: (the levels of) differentiation and integration. Differentiation refers to the ability to differentiate, i.e. the dimensions of stimuli that are recognized and taken into account in decision-making or debate. Differentiation is based on the source's recognition (and possible acceptance) of alternative perspectives and a number of different dimensions. In general, people who are capable of processing more complex information differentiate a larger number of characteristics in any given multidimensional stimulus situation. Consequently, the more such dimensions are recognized, the more complex will be the individual's reaction to the stimulus. Integration refers to the ability to make complex conceptual connections among the differentiated characteristics, i.e. the combination of the different perspectives and dimensions in synthesized solutions (also known as *synthesis*). More complexity in communication means that more multiple, complex and flexible connections (instead of isolated, hierarchical interactions) between the dimensions are recognized (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977).

Figure 2.1: Scale of Integrative Complexity (source: own design)

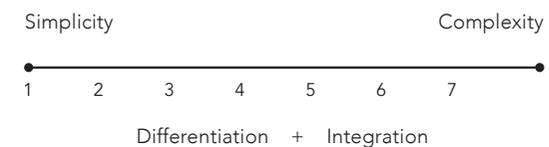


Table 2.3: Integrative Complexity Scoring (source: Suedfeld, 2010, pp. 1672-1673)

Score	Definition	Illustrative Example	Explanation of Score
1	No differentiation No integration	I refuse to even discuss it. I will tell them what we're going to do, and they can just wait until I get around to it. I am not at all interested in what they want to happen or what they think of my plans.	A single rule for decision-making, and an explicit rejection of other perspectives.
3	Differentiation No integration	We are trying to find a solution. We will consult various stakeholders and consider the need for the program, its cost, and how it compares to the other available options. At some point, when we have the relevant information, we will choose the best program.	Recognition of several sources of information (various stakeholders) and dimensions (need, cost, comparison) of the problem needed to make a decision; acceptance of delay in coming to closure until relevant information is obtained.
5	Differentiation Integration (trade-off)	Investing in "green" industry will benefit some aspects of the economy, but those benefits may come at a cost to other industries. A decline in those industries may in turn make further "green" investments impossible. Of course, "green" investments may also make other industries more profitable, so that both sectors could benefit. If other sectors are doing well, that may free up funds to support more "green" investments.	Recognition of possible wider impacts of a decision to invest in "green" industry, and of the reciprocal interactions between such investments and the state of other economic sectors.
7	Differentiation Integration within a superordinate schema	Sacrificing agricultural production in order to devote more manpower and funds to industrial development will be a hardship for our people. It will, however, lead to a better life for the people in the future and deter potential enemies abroad. The present sacrifice for future gain will enable us to fulfil our historical destiny in the inexorable march of human progress.	Consideration of the interactive relationship (trade-off) between investments in agriculture and industry, and between present and long-term drawbacks and benefits. These considerations are then subsumed under an overarching schema concerning the nation's "historical destiny."

The simplicity-complexity dimension can be considered on a (7-point) scale on which simple language and complex language mark both endings (see Figure 2.1). Simple language can be defined as "anchoring around a few salient reference points; the perception of only one side of an argument or problem; the ignoring of subtle differences or similarities among other points of view; the perceiving of other participants, courses of action, and possible outcomes as being either totally good or totally bad; and a search for rapid and absolute solutions in order to achieve minimization of uncertainty and ambiguity. At the complex end, we find flexible and open information processing; the use of many dimensions in an integrated, combinatorial fashion; continued search for novelty and for further information; and the ability to consider multiple points of view simultaneously, to integrate them, and then to respond flexibly to them" (Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977, p. 172). In two studies in this dissertation we explore the concepts of simplification through different degrees of integrative complexity in political language (Chapters 3 and 5).

Measuring Integrative Complexity

The scoring of complexity is based on each new idea or thought in (a section of) the studied materials (see Baker-Brown et al., 1992). Because of the fact that integration requires a certain level of differentiation (cf. Hoffman and Slater, 2007) the scoring of 'level of complexity' is defined in terms of the increasing degree of differentiation and integration (in this order) in the cognitive processing of relevant arguments, positions, and viewpoints (Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988). The integrative complexity score is measured on a 7-point ordinal scale. A complexity score of '1' or '2' means no or barely differentiation, score '3' shows differentiation, but no integration of different points of view. The scores from '1 to 3' indicate increasing differentiation, i.e. the recognition that more than one dimension or perception of an issue can be valid and legitimate (Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988, p. 628). The authors give an example of this kind of increase by indicating the difference between a view of a (political) opponent as completely evil and unreasonable (no differentiation), and one's viewpoint of defending his or her own standpoint, while recognizing that others have legitimate reasons to see the issue in different ways. Scores from '5 to 7' contain already differentiation of different arguments, and show also increasing degrees of integration of the differentiated arguments. This indicates the understanding of interactions, syntheses, and joint probabilities and

outcomes. Examples of high levels of integration are references to offering concessions or working together on proposed solutions. Finally, a score of '4' is an intermediate point, indicating a high level of differentiation and a start of integration (Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988, pp. 628-629). Generally, the odd I.C. scores '1' (no differentiation, no integration), '3' (differentiation, but no integration), '5' (differentiation and trade-off integration) and '7' (differentiation and superordinate schematic integration) are benchmark scores, whereas the even scores '2', '4' and '6' are 'transition values', indicating an inclination towards a higher value though insufficient to actually reach that higher score (Suedfeld, 2010, pp. 1672-1673, and see Table 2.3).

Procedure of scoring integrative complexity

The average of all selected scoring units is used to calculate the overall integrative complexity score of a source, which we can compare to the mean complexity scores of other sources^{xiii}. Usually a minimum of five randomly selected coding units (paragraphs) of one singular source is required to draw generally accepted conclusions of the source's complexity scores (e.g. Smith, 1992, p. 403). Whereas content analysis normally relies on 'content-counting rules' (e.g. fixed cues of words), integrative complexity scoring rather relies on the judgment of the coders "who may have to make subtle inferences about the intended meaning of speakers" (Baker-Brown et al., 1992, p 3). For example, the 'transition scores' (2, 4, 6) can lead to disagreement whether signs of either differentiation or integration are actually present or not. This demands for three basic preliminary coding ground rules. First, rating agreement between coders needs to be measured, prior to the overall coding, following the standard rules of *inter-rater reliability (or agreement)* ($\kappa \geq .85$) (Suedfeld, 2010). Second, disagreement in scores between different coders cannot exceed 1 point in a scoring unit, otherwise the particular scores (outliers) will be coded as 'missing values'. And third, the coders should be well trained and keep in mind several important aspects during the coding process. The key element of these aspects is that the analysis of level of complexity does not contain "an assessment of appropriateness, practicality, effectiveness, or morality" (Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977, p. 173). This means that "[t]he coder should not assume that it is always 'better' to be more complex" (Baker-Brown et al., 1992, p. 3). The integrative complexity scale is not a normative scale that defines right from wrong, and it is important to point out that higher levels of complexity do not automatically guarantee better, more

correct or more justified argumentation or decisions: complex argumentation can still be untrue or morally wrong (Baker-Brown et al., 1992; Suedfeld, 2010). Coders should focus on structure, rather than on the content or the beliefs of the source, and personal preferences should not be allowed to effect the scoring. The advantages of the method are, notwithstanding, that it allows for a systematic, standard procedure of measuring levels of complexity in an objective and useful way, it is universal and comparable, and the real-life product causes high ecological validity (Suedfeld, 2010).

For reliable outcomes, it is necessary to use a sample of at least forty randomly selected paragraphs, with distinction of different time periods (see Baker-Brown et al., 1992). Normally, a single paragraph that contains one thought is considered a basic unit for analysis, and receives a score between 1 and 7 on the complexity scale. However, if multiple paragraphs in one text express one similar thought (one idea on one subject) than the whole of paragraphs becomes the basic unit of scoring. The average of all selected scoring units is used to calculate the overall integrative complexity score of a source, which we can compare to the mean complexity scores of other sources. In order to start the coding procedure all randomly selected scoring units of the total sample are ought to be *anonymised*. This means that information that can identify the source – such as the text's source, date and author – is being withheld and/or replaced by generic words (e.g. Thoemmes and Conway, 2007, p. 202).

The scoring of the text samples is executed by trained coders. The coders followed an in-depth training, provided by the founders of the method, including a series of pre-tests and an examination tests for inter-raters' agreement with the expert coders ($\kappa > .85$), in order to become expert coders themselves. The detailed coding *manual* for integrative complexity by Baker-Brown et al. (1992) provides further guidelines of the standard coding procedure. With the coding manual as a basis, a coding scheme (with instructions) has been developed (see Appendix C: Table C.6). After successful accomplishment of the training, a series of practices and pre-tests have been executed between both coders in order to measure the inter-raters' agreement on the real case data, which was a high agreement but did not succeed the requested level of agreement ($\kappa < .85$). In order to increase the reliability, mean coding scores of both coders involved per text sample are measured. All outliers, i.e. scores that differed above 1 point on the scale in between coders, have been removed from the samples.

OPERATIONALIZATION

Data selection and collection

Selection of cases

Naturally, there are different kinds of communication utterances to obtain from politicians, depending on e.g. platform, media format and channel. In the first place there is a difference in written versus spoken media, such as newspaper interviews versus television appearances. Secondly, the format of the medium designates whether the communication is directly aimed at the general public (e.g. interviews), at a more selective audience (e.g. speeches at a party convention) or at other politicians (e.g. political debates). In the different studies throughout this dissertation one will find a variety of sources for the political content that is analysed, which can be divided into two groups, namely interviews, press releases, opinion pieces or columns in news media on the one hand, and political debates in parliament on the other hand. In most empirical analyses we are interested in the political communication from a diversity of parties that is directly derived from the politicians, thus without or with minimal interference of a medium. The aim of each different study determines the kind of communication, the format and whether we are looking at communication at a party-level or at an individual level (or both). The selected cases are usually divided into different categories. Coding instructions ask for several variables on which these categorizations take place, such as individual politician, party affiliation (or party name), party role (government party or opposition party) and politicians' role (party leader versus non-leader). Other independent variables include date (and year), gender and length of the text sample.

Political parties included

For this content analysis data is used that is reduced to communication outings directly originating from politicians in Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands. In the quantitative studies of Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 8 we use a random sample of political

debates in either the Dutch House of Representatives, also called the Second Chamber in the Netherlands^{iv}, or in Flemish (regional) Parliament. Belgium consists, besides a general Belgian Federal government (and parliament), of several Communities and/or Regions (such as the Flemish, the Walloon and the Brussels-Capital), which have their own regional governments (and parliaments). The study focuses on the most important representatives of the different decision-making parties involved, which are the parties (and their party leaders) of both government and (the major) opposition parties. For both the case of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) we include seven major political parties that are most prominent in parliament and debates (see Table 2.4). The permanent smaller parties are excluded from the sample, because of the absence of different politicians in parliament, and the lack of participation of these parties in general in the political debates.

Table 2.4: Major political parties and their ideological position in parliament in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) (source: own design)

Party	Full name (in Dutch)	English name	Ideological positioning ^a
The Netherlands			
CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christian Democratic Appeal	Centre-right
D'66 (D66)	Democraten '66	Democrats 66	Centre
GroenLinks (GL)	-	Green Left	Left
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid	Labour Party	Centre-left
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom	Radical-right
SP	Socialistische Partij	Socialist Party	Radical-left
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	Centre-right
Flanders (Belgium)			
CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams	Christian Democratic Flemish	Centre-right
Groen ^b	-	Green	Left
LDD ^c	Libertair, Direct, Democratisch	Libertarian, Direct, Democratic	Radical-right

N-VA ^d	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	New-Flemish Alliance	Right
Open VLD ^e	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Centre-right
Sp.a ^f	Socialistische Partij Anders	Socialist Party Different	Centre-left
Vlaams Belang (VB) ^g	-	Flemish Interest	Radical-right

^a The ideological positioning is a rough classification based on the parties' own positioning (on e.g. their websites) and the positional division (from an ideological left-right view) in the actual parliaments. In Chapter 6 we elaborate more extensively on the ideological classification of political parties in both the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium).

^b Formerly known as *Groen!*

^c Formerly known as *Lijst DeDecker*

^d N-VA formed an alliance (known as 'cartel') with CD&V between 2004 and 2008

^e Formerly known as *VLD*

^f Formerly known as Sp.a-Spirit (as part of an alliance between Sp.a and Spirit between 2002-2008)

^g Formerly known as *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Block)

Research samples

The complete reports of all parliamentary debates are openly accessible and extracted from the official websites of the different governments. Both the website of the Flemish parliament (www.vlaamsparlement.be) and the Dutch parliament (zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl) contains a database in which reports and related items concerning all parliamentary debates and meetings from decades ago up to present day are stored and open to be consulted. The websites also provide searching systems that allow for selection of only reports of general parliamentary debates, or even for specific debates in order to ensure similar circumstances for subjects of analysis. For example, in Chapter 5 we performed a series of analyses of different years of the (yearly recurring) General Budget Debates^{xv}. Furthermore, for the examination of specific crisis communication in Chapter 3, we were able to search for political debates that were entirely devoted to the two crises (and with that a distinction between crisis versus non-crisis periods could be made).

From all data that was available, in each study a sample of data has been randomly selected^{xvi} and divided into text samples (more information is given in each separate study). A singular text sample consists of a consecutive contribution of a member of parliament (or government) during a political debate in parliament. This all resulted

in different research samples, which are expected to be valid representations of the political communication in the parliaments. A total sum of (at least) over 106,000 (Flanders) to 160,000 (the Netherlands) words in each study is used for analysis^{xvii}.

Time periods

The text samples have been randomly selected from documented reports at the database of the official websites in different time periods, more or less equally divided over consecutive years. The data selection aims for a longer period that enables us to make (longitudinal) analysis over time. By this means we try to avoid drawing general conclusion based on only a specific moment in time. Besides, the succession of time gives the opportunity to identify changes over time, because external circumstances changed simultaneously. For instance, in both Flanders (Belgium) as the Netherlands two general elections took place in the periods of analyses. In Flanders parliamentary debates between 2000 and 2005 (Chapter 3) and between 2006 and 2011 (Chapter 4) have been selected and analysed. For the Netherlands the years between 2006 and 2013 (Chapter 5 and 8) were analysed.

Other data

Chapter 3 (partly) and Chapter 7 contain (also) other sorts of data: direct communication in written news media, namely interviews, columns, opinion pieces and press releases. Besides the crisis communication in parliamentary debates, Chapter 3 is also aimed at the analysis of written interviews with Flemish policy-makers and members of the Flemish Parliament at the highest level. To ensure that the analysed communication is in fact literally from the involved politicians, we made use of question-answer interviews and the so-called *straight-quote model*, so only actual quotes of the politicians are included. This resulted in a selection of 160 interviews, consisting of 120,620 words. The interviews are extracted out of four different and biggest Flemish newspapers (*De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Gazet van Antwerpen*). All newspapers are written in Dutch.

The data that is used in Chapter 7 is selected in order to examine the (metaphorical) language of one particular politician in the Netherlands, i.e. Geert Wilders (Party for Freedom). The data consists of 23 columns (14,643 words in total, average of 636 words

per column), 18 opinion pieces (14,206 words, av. 789 words) and 39 press releases (6,323 words, av. 162 words). The texts are taken from the media database of the official PVV website and Geert Wilders' personal website^{xviii}. The total database of 35,172 words concerns the time period from September 2004 to June 2010.

Chapter 6 is a theoretical study and uses data from other researches, primarily Albertazzi and McDonnell's collection *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (2008) and the *Chapel Hill Expert Survey* from 2010 (Bakker et al, 2015).

Data collection

Pre-testing

As we already argued at the different procedures of measuring the various variables, pre-testing is one of the main priorities before one could start the actual data collection. By pre-testing the measurement, we test for the usability of the measuring instrument, the coding scheme and the quality of data in general. Additionally, the procedure of coding can be learned and practiced. Finally, and probably most importantly, this provides the necessary information in order to see similarity (or disagreement) in judging the data between coders. We execute inter-coder agreement (or reliability) scores by using Cohen's Kappa reliability calculation in SPSS, based on the similarity of coding over ten per cent of double coded data. The agreement that is required usually varies, depending on the coding instructions, from $\kappa \geq .60$ to $\kappa \geq .85$. Whenever the first pre-test the inter-rater scores did not reach the required level of agreement, the pre-tests were carefully examined on coding disagreements, errors and missed items, and the coders involved were asked to indicate any encountered difficulties or inconveniences. Eventually, the instruments and/or coding schemes were adjusted and improved, followed by a new round of pre-testing. This procedure was repeated until we were generally satisfied with the results of agreement (and reliability scores) (but see on this matter also the Discussion session in Chapter 9).

Documentation, coding and analysing

For all different content analyses an important part of the data collection is the documentation of the randomly selected coding samples. Every text sample is treated in a way that the text is prepared for analysis into clear-cut pieces of similar lengths and divided into paragraphs, cleaned from additional text and/or information, and provided with a coding serial number. The serial number and exact length of the sample (in number of words) is documented, as well as all additional information that functions as necessary independent variables, such as date, source (party and politician), party role, gender, etc. Subsequently, all this information is blinded before the coding takes place, thus the samples are *anonymised* for further analysis, and distributed among the coders. Every empirical study uses a specifically designed coding scheme in order to make the coding easier to execute and more systematically applicable. See further appendix C for the coding schemes that are used. The coding of the data is already explained more detailed in the procedure of measurement sections at each different variable.

The raw data that can be derived from the coding schemes is transmitted and imported into the software of SPSS Statistics v.20 (2011) for further statistical analysis. Statistical analysis can differ between studies, although most analyses use bivariate descriptive and comparative methods in order to test for significant differences between variables (e.g. t-test, ANOVA), as well as Pierson's correlation tests.

NOTES

- i Validity can be defined as “an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which theoretical rationales and empirical evidence support the adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations and actions based on test scores or other methods of assessment” (Messick, 1989, p. 13).
- ii Throughout this dissertation also referred to as inter-coder agreement or *reliability*, which is all basically the same principle.
- iii See De Landtsheer, 2015, for the latest version of the Metaphor Power Index. Earlier version and additional elaboration on this theory can be found in e.g. De Landtsheer, 1991, 1994, 1998b, 2007, 2009; Vertessen and De Landtsheer, 2007.
- iv An allegory is the figurative similarity of an abstract concept, such as the use of a parable (the comparison of something by means of a fictive story, illustration) often expressed in a brief narrative. The resemblance with metaphor is the cognitive transferring of underlying information and thus the creation of a new meaning. They all have underlying narrative meanings: it is like telling a whole (short) story with only one or a few words.
- v The concepts of metaphor, synecdoche (figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa) and metonymy (figure of speech in which what is literally meant is substituted by a figurative associated referent) are closely related to each other; they are all forms of imagery, and usually overlapping. Whereas metonymy is seen as interchangeable with metaphor, synecdoche is often perceived as a form of metonymy. The difference between them is that the imagery in synecdoche is an actual component or part of the referent, whereas that is not necessarily the case with a metonym, which essentially consists of a relatedness of contiguity between image and referent (mostly a physical relationship). In a metaphor there is usually no physical relationship between the image and referent, but is rather, on the contrary, a construction of two different conceptual domains that are brought together to create new meaning (e.g. Wodak, 2002).
- vi Both metaphor and hyperbole are often intertwined with the other rhetorical figure. Metaphors can be hyperbolic utterances, whereas hyperboles can be metaphorical of nature. Metaphors often occur in a discursive context of hyperbolic formulations (a metaphor is used to exaggerate reality). Likewise, many rhetorical exaggerations are ‘disguised’ as metaphorical (or sometimes analogical, ironic or other figurative expressions). See for instance the examples given in this section that can be perceived as both metaphorical and hyperbolic. Since they occur very often simultaneously, it is important that these types of hyperbolic metaphors or metaphorical hyperboles shall not be lost in the coding.
- vii Source: <http://www.etymonline.com>.
- viii In classical literature two kinds of hyperbole are distinguished: *auxesis* (or exaggerated intensification/enlargement) and *meiosis* (or exaggerated reduction/attenuation) (see e.g. Smith (1675) in McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 151).
- ix Polysyndeton is defined as the use of several conjunctions in close succession, typically involving repetition of the same conjunction to connect a number of co-ordinated words, phrases or clauses (McCarthy and Carter, 2004).
- x Translated from Dutch. Original citation: “*Wij spreken vandaag over de begroting [en de Miljoenennota 2009], een flutstuk van het slechtste kabinet ooit.*” (own translation)

xi Cano Mora (2009) distinguishes a third semantic field that is situated between the positive and negative evaluated hyperbole: the category of impact or singularity. This subfield expresses the idea of speciality, notability and astonishment, while simultaneously assuming either positive or negative emotional connotations (such as smashing, amazed, or shocking). Although hyperboles in the category of impact or singularity are included in calculation of the number of hyperbole, the ambiguity of value that is expressed through singularity of impact hyperbole has led to exclusion of this subcategory of hyperbole in our study.

xii An example of a positive formulated hyperbole is “*The results are not only promising, but just excellent!*” (Hero Brinkman, PVV, 10-06-2010 in Dutch Parliament).

xiii Average I.C. scores in political speech appear to be rather low on the complexity scale, as previous studies show. The study by Thoenes and Conway (2007) found a total mean of *I.C.* = 1.77, on an overall range between 1.25 (J. Tyler) and 2.18 (J.F. Kennedy), as the average integrative complexity score of 41 former presidents of the United States (2007: 203-204). Integrative complexity analysis of editorials and opinion columns on forum pages in newspapers resulted in an overall complexity mean score of *I.C.* = 2.3 and the conclusion that although differentiation might regularly occur, integration of different points of view (score 4 or higher) practically never happens (Hoffman and Slater, 2007: 64). Suedfeld et al. (1998) found even lower average complexity scores in editorials (*I.C.* = 1.9 in local and *I.C.* = 1.7 in national newspapers). It is accounted that the *I.C.* of political leaders is very low prior and during crises, however, even when politics does not involve circumstances of psychological stress complexity scores appear to be in the lower half of the 7-point scale as well (see Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Wallace et al., 1993; Guttieri et al., 1995; De Landtsheer, 2007).

xiv The House of Representatives (or ‘Second Chamber’) is one of two chambers (besides the ‘First Chamber’, or Senate) in the Dutch bicameral parliamentary system. The House of Representatives harbors the cabinet (ministers and state secretaries) and all elected political parties. Within the Second Chamber, political representation is given, legislation is proposed and discussed, and the members of cabinet are reviewed. All these functions make the House of Representatives the most important in the political decision-making process.

xv In Dutch: *Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen*. The General Political Debates follow after the Day of the Queen’s (or presently: King’s) speech (*troonrede*) about the yearly national budget (usually on the third Tuesday in September. During the Debates, which serve as the most important yearly possibility to discuss the state of the country, every party leader has a chance to defend or criticize the past acts and future plans of the incumbent (or newly elected) government. On the second day, the Prime Minister comments on the Budget and responds to the questions and remarks that have been made. News media pay relatively much attention to these debates compared to ordinary political debates in the Dutch parliaments.

xvi In most studies, a random selection was made, based on each first debate on each consecutive webpage. In case the first rapport was insufficient (e.g. too short, or too few parties included) the next rapport was chosen, and so forth.

xvii An overview of the data that is used, as well as the codings of the samples, are available on request – only for scientific purposes – by contacting the author (Lieuwe.Kalkhoven@uantwerpen.be).

xviii Website: <http://www.pvv.nl/index.php/in-de-media>. This is the link to the media-archive of PVV. Texts are also to be found on <http://www.geertwilders.nl>.

CHAPTER 3: THE SMELL OF CRISIS

Certain changes in situations 'demand' for changes in

political leaders' style and rhetoric,

in order to be 'successful' as a politician.

This chapter is based on the following publication:

De Landtsheer, C. and Kalkhoven, L. (2012). The Smell of Crisis: Style and Rhetoric of Political Parties in and outside Crises Situations in three Belgian cases. *Politics, Culture and Socialization*, 3(1-2), 131-154.

Abstract

What explains rhetorical differences between political parties in one and the same political context? One could theorise that various external and internal circumstances influence the degree in which political language is more, or less, rhetorical. For instance, the outlook of political communication style is different in and outside crises. Depending upon the *stress* factor, there is a move from a non-rhetorical ‘cognitive, expressive, and content-oriented’ non-crisis style to a rhetorical ‘emotive, impressive, and audience-oriented’ crisis rhetoric. This chapter aims to test the theory of a crisis communication combination (CCC) pattern. According to this CCC theory, (a high degree of) crisis rhetoric relies upon three cognitive and/or linguistic variables, which are (1) a simplistic worded rhetoric, (2) full of metaphor power and (3) audience oriented use of modals. The empirical sections of the chapter investigate style and rhetoric of Belgian political parties in and outside crises during the period 2000-2005. In the first study, two cases represent examples of clear-cut political crises (crisis versus non-crisis periods), whereas a second study presents a third case that deals with an election campaign as a crisis-like situation (election versus non-election periods). From the results of all three cases can be concluded that it is possible to ‘smell’ the crisis in political style. In all cases, the CCC-value is approximately three times higher in crisis time than in non-crisis time. Additional results show that parties at the endings of the political spectrum achieve significantly higher CCC-indices than more centred parties, both in crisis and in non-crisis time. The variance of rhetorical used in periods without a direct external cause for rhetorical-oriented language suggests the overall presence of a crisis-like communication style in political discourse, especially among the parties at the left and – especially – at the right ends of the political spectrum.

THE SMELL OF CRISIS

Introduction

Already in ancient Greece, the art of rhetoric has been described, for instance in Aristotle’s famous *Retorica*, as a way to ‘use’ language and style of persuasion and argumentation in political debate. In contemporary research rhetoric is often seen as finding the way to appeal to the emotions of the audience as a major persuasive ‘instrument’. Political leaders’ persuasive effort is likely to change prior and during circumstances that appeal to strong emotions in societies, such as feelings of uncertainty, anxiety or fear. Most of these circumstances are considered as crises. This varies from economic recessions to situations of oppression or even war. Lasswell et al. (1949, p. 23) defined a crisis as “a situation in which severe deprivations, such as violence, are inflicted or threatened [while] the structure of expectation is the dominant feature of crisis”. Others refer to crisis as circumstances with an increase of *stress* (e.g. Holsti, 1972; Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977; Wallace et al., 1993). Previous theoretical and empirical work suggests that the occurrence of crisis, or the increased stress factor, may significantly affect the relation between leader and followers. Times of crisis make it more likely that followers need strong leader figures and therefore are willing to restore or increase faith in leaders, to see them as more powerful, and to identify with them more (Edelman, 1974). This makes a crisis an opportunity for (political) leaders to act in stronger, more decisive and potentially more meaningful ways. This strong leadership is often associated with charismatic leadershipⁱ (Bligh et al., 2004). It is likely that crisis in society leads to a public that demands a charismatic form of leadership, to “restore their own sense of coping ability by linking themselves to a dominant and seemingly effective leader” (Madsen and Snow, 1991, p. 15). Beyer (1999) notes that perceptions of strong social needs among followers, such as a shared perception of crisis, may drive them to “socially construct and project qualities on a person to satisfy that need” (p. 581). In other words, certain emotive situations can raise a collective desire for exceptional leadership qualities, eventually attributed to a leader’s actual qualities.

Especially in times of crisis, politicians rely also upon rhetorical tools. In terms of Aristotle (Billig, 2003), politicians tend to move to a certain extent from *logos* (rational argumentation) oriented political discourse to *pathos* (or emotive) elements. The *ethos* (the character the speaker wishes to present) influences the political rhetoric or is being affected as a communication style. This means that the style of politics is changing prior to, during, or after a particular crisis.

How can we describe the changing style of political leaders due to crisis? More than half a century ago Lasswell distinguished an “emotive” – i.e. tending to arouse emotions – and ornamental political crisis style from an everyday life, effect-modelled, varied, and cognitive non-crisis style (Lasswell, 1949; De Landtsheer, 2009, p. 61). Windt and Ingold (1987) divided changes in rhetoric due to a crisis into ‘impressive’ versus ‘expressive’ rhetoric. Expressive rhetoric can be described as non-strategically, straightforward language, aimed at purity of doctrines. When using expressive rhetoric there is less aim for persuasion of an audience. In contrast, when political leaders adjust their language to meet norms, values, and traditions of their audience, their rhetoric can be considered impressive. Weinberg (1995) uses a comparable classification, but with different terminology in defining rhetoric as pragmatic argumentation. His notion of an ‘impressive’ rhetoric, called on ‘audience-oriented’ style, describes an argumentation that aims at connecting with the audience by pointing at topics that are known to be present in the public opinion (in contrast to a ‘content-oriented’ style). In other words, depending on what concerns the audience, the rhetoric and argumentation can adjust this concern, with the result that the audience-oriented politician reproduces the words of the audience. In normal situations within democratic societies, political rhetoric ought to balance between the expressive and impressive style of communication.

CCC theory

When analysing the theoretical frameworks of crisis style and the changes in political rhetoric, certain patterns can be found. Different studies more or less point out the same changes in rhetoric during or ahead of a crisis. There is a move from cognitive to emotive, from *logos* to *pathos*, from expressive to impressive, and from content-oriented to audience-oriented. These shifts involve different language related changes.

Previous empirical crisis style study by De Landtsheer and De Vrij (2004) demonstrated a contrast between a rhetorical non-complex, metaphorical crisis style pattern versus a complex and non-metaphorical non-crisis style elements. Two cognitive style variables, a metaphor power index (e.g. De Landtsheer, 2015) and integrative complexity scores (e.g. Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988) were used to differentiate an emotive and simplifying discourse from a cognitive and complex discourse. The study indicated a positive correlation between the use of metaphors (high metaphor power) and the simplicity of language (low integrative complexity). In a case study on radical political style, De Landtsheer (2007) added a third variable to the initial crisis style model: the empathic use of modals. This variable was constructed from Anderson’s (1998) and Sweetser’s (1990, 1995) “pragmatically ambiguous modals”, verbs that have the capacity to vary the direction of the audience attention (De Landtsheer, 2007, p. 60). This chapter aims to examine the ‘crisis style pattern’ for political crises in a current political case. Altogether, the cognitive variables of metaphor power (*pathos*), integrative complexity (*logos*) and the pragmatically ambiguous use of modals (*ethos*) form the Crisis Communication Combination theory (CCC theory), that allows for identification of a political crisis style.

Metaphors

Metaphors are linguistic elements that describe certain objects by using alternative and figurative words, in order to frame and/or change the meaning of the object (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004). Metaphors are used in people’s rhetoric to simplify reality: complex language can be transformed into a more understandable representation of reality. The reason for this simplification is that, similar to the use of symbols and other simplified argumentation, the human mind is used to and searches for shared ‘intersubjective’ meaning. By using metaphors, the meaning of the world becomes clearer and more reassuring, as guidance through complex issues. Moreover, metaphors appeal to emotions in society, because they add particular (desired) connotations to the perception of the subject. Research showed that by using metaphors, one evokes emotions (Gibbs et al., 2002) and that persuasion is eased (Sopory and Dillard, 2002). Politicians could benefit from using metaphors in their daily discourse, as it eases persuasion and it provides for the connection between the orator (the politician) and

the listener (the public).

The impact of the metaphor depends upon the power of the connotation. Metaphor power analysis allows for the qualification and quantification of emotive power in discourse through a metaphor power index (see e.g. De Landtsheer, 1994, 1998b, 2007, 2009, 2015; Vertessen and De Landtsheer, 2007; Krasnoboka and De Landtsheer, 2007). The metaphor power index (MPI) assesses the frequency (MF) of metaphors per 100 words, the intensity (MI) or originality of the metaphor (counted on a 3-point scale, of which 1 represents a weak metaphor and 3 a strong metaphor), and the content of the metaphor (MC). Different semantic fields or sources from which meaning is derived such as illness, nature, or family can be grouped into content categories that with ascending metaphor power (De Landtsheer, 2009). These content categoriesⁱⁱ can be divided into a range of six groups of metaphors (see Appendix C: Table C.1). See for further elaboration: Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Metaphors from the higher categories offer politicians the ability to evoke strong emotions and to be manipulative. In times of crisis it is likely that politicians resort to these strong and emotion arousing expressions, to respond to the mental needs corresponding to ‘crisis feelings,’ such as escapism (from reality), pessimism and anxiety, and the lack of self-confidence.

The metaphor power index (MPI) in the CCC-index can be calculated by multiplying the three indices metaphor frequency (MFI), intensity (MII) and content (MCI), which provides us the following simple logistic:

$$\sum \text{MPI} = \text{MFI} \times \text{MII} \times \text{MCI}$$

Integrative complexity theory

To measure simplification in political discourse during crises through rhetorical elements, CCC theory makes use of integrative complexity (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Thoemmes and Conway, 2007), a psychological construct that describes the elaboration and complexity of any given information and thought. Complexity theory departs from the ability to distinguish different viewpoints (levels of differentiation), and the ability to make conceptual connections among differentiated dimensions (integration). According to previous research, political

leaders avoid complex language and simplify their rhetoric when circumstances suggest that this might be politically beneficial. Non-complex rhetoric makes political decisions and discussions easier to understand and it comforts certain feelings by the audience. In other words, in crises, simplifying rhetoric fulfils particular emotional needs by the audience (Wallace et al., 1993; Tetlock, 2005; Stein, 2013).

The integrative complexity (I.C.) score is measured on a 7-point scale, while the basic scoring of complexity is based on each new idea or thought in (a section of) the studied materials. Inasmuch in Chapter 2 the nature and methodology of integrative complexity theory is explained in more depth, in short, a complexity score of 1 or 2 means no or barely differentiation, score 3 shows differentiation, but no integration of different points of view, and finally a score of 4 or higher contains differentiation and ascending degrees of integration (see also Appendix C: Table C.5). The level of complexity forms the second variable, the CC-score, in the crisis-index.

Modals

Modals are verbs that express possibility, obligation, or necessity (e.g. ought, need, must, etc.)ⁱⁱⁱ (Sweetser, 1990). The term *pragmatic ambiguity* indicates the capacity of modals to vary the direction of audience attention. “In contrast to semantic ambiguity, which exists when a single lexical item can express different meanings in one context, pragmatic ambiguity exists when a lexical item retains a single semantic meaning across contexts but speakers use that meaning for different purposes in different contexts” (Anderson, 1998, pp. 66-67). A modal contains a certain ambiguity because of its varying intentional meaning, depending on the context. By using modal verbs, a political leader has the opportunity to remind the audience of certain values that should be respected.

According to Anderson (1998), there are three kinds of modals use in their pragmatic ambiguity. The first type of use of modals is an epistemic use of modal verbs, which means that a speaker can use a certain amount of reasonability in his inferences about a situation. This is in contrast with the second type, the speech-act modals, that consists of the (expressive) interaction between the speaker and the audience. Because both kind of use of modals lead to a connection between speaker and audience, we put them in a category entitled emphatic use of modals. A third type of use of modals represents the

content meaning of the modal verbs. In contrast to the first category of modals, this category refers to the social or physical world experienced by the speaker. This empathic (which is given the symbol E+) versus content use of modals (i.e. E-) has been added as a third variable in de crisis communication combination theory (De Landtsheer, 2007). E+ represents the average number of empathic (thus both speech-act and epistemic) modals used per 100 words in an oral or written speech. It is expected that E+ values are higher in political crisis speeches than in non-crisis speeches. On the counterpart, the non-empathic, content use of modals (E-) represents the non-crisis communication condition.

The procedure is as follows. Modals are collected in the material and classified into one of the three categories: content (E-), epistemic (E+) or speech-act (E+) usage, according to the rules summarized by Sweetser (1990): “(...) applying the relevant modality to: (1) the content of the sentence: the real world event must or may take place; (2) the epistemic entity represented by the sentence: the speaker is forced to, or (not) barred from, concluding the truth of the sentence; (3) the speech act represented by the sentence: the speaker (or people in general) is forced to, or (not) barred from, saying what the sentence says” (1990, pp. 72-73).

CCC-index

The crisis communication combination (CCC) pattern can be measured for a text or a speech by opposing the impressive and emotive use of metaphors and the empathic use of modals against the expressive and cognitive use of integrative complexity and content modals. In this calculation we multiply the metaphor power index (MPI, or C in the formula below) by the empathic modals index (E+), and we divide this product by the multiplication of the integrative complexity level index (I.C., or CC in the formula) and the non-empathic (or content) modals index (E-). In summation:

$$\sum CCC = \frac{(C \cdot E+)}{(CC \cdot E-)}$$

Hypotheses

The present study analyses one of many components of the complex relationship between linguistics and political psychology, namely the influence of a stress factor on political situations. Different circumstances lead to different degrees of stress. This stress factor, according to theory and empirical research, expresses itself (amongst others) into differences in political rhetoric, or political crisis rhetoric versus non-crisis rhetoric (e.g. Lasswell, 1949; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1998; Anderson, 1998; De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004). In times of crisis or increased stress, it is very likely that the rhetoric advances from cognitive, expressive, content-oriented language in the direction of emotive, impressive, audience-oriented language (e.g. Bligh et al., 2004).

Regarding the measurement construct for crisis communication in this study, we have differentiated several indicators that refer to changes in political style and rhetoric due to crises. Indicators of these changes are the rhetorical movements from expressive, cognitive and content-oriented rhetoric to impressive, emotive and audience-oriented rhetoric (or vice versa). It is expected that the use of (more, more intense and categorically higher) metaphors increases an emotive, impressive and audience-oriented rhetoric and is therefore often used in times of elections and in crises. Secondly, previous research has found that political discourse becomes more simple or standardized ahead of, during, and right after politically emotive circumstances, such as elections or crisis (e.g. De Sola Pool, 1956; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Thoemmes and Conway, 2007). A study by Wallace et al. (1993) showed, for example, the impact of disruptive stress of crisis during the Gulf war on the complexity of leader’s information process. And finally, De Landtsheer showed that during crisis a politician’s “impressive use of modals resulted in a predominantly empathic use of modals combined with a low non-empathic use of modals” (2007, p. 65). When an audience is in a state of uncertainty or anxiety, the use of pragmatically ambiguous modals can lead to mobilization or changes in the audience’s state of mind. In this matter, a (political) speaker has the ability to manipulate his audience in an impressive way. The ‘empathic’ use of modals could be linked to Lasswell’s (1949) emotive and accessory style for persuasion and crisis, while content use of modals is related to the cognitive, non-crisis style (De Landtsheer, 2007).

This study will examine the differences in political crisis communication between different parties at the political spectrum (left versus right parties) in different times (crisis versus non-crisis time). Based on the theoretical framework we expect:

H1: Prior and during the crisis the CCC-value of crisis communication style by politicians is significantly higher than in non-crisis times, due to linguistic rhetorical changes with respect to:

- 1.1. Increased Metaphor Power (frequency, intensity and content) (C)
- 1.2. Increased use of empathic modals (epistemic and speech-act) (E+) in contrast to content modals (E-)
- 1.3. Decreased integrative complexity (CC)

Political crisis can be seen in different ways. Certain changes in situations 'demand' for changes in political leaders' style and rhetoric, in order to be 'successful' as a politician. There are several (political) situations imaginable, except for clear crises, in which the level of stress is increased in society (and among politicians). Times of political elections can be seen as *crisis-like* circumstances, as politicians are faced a high amount of political stress or benefit from increased stress among the public. Whenever there is a direct political need to persuade the public (e.g. to achieve electoral support), political language and style *adjust* to that need in trying to be more persuasive. Yet a large number of studies showed differences in political style and rhetoric between times of election campaigns and times after the elections (see e.g. Lasswell, 1949; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1998; Anderson, 1998; Vertessen and De Landtsheer, 2007). Times of political elections could be considered as *crisis-like* situations, and therefore it is assumed that rhetorical changes will occur that are similar to the hypothesized crisis communication shift between times of crisis and non-crisis (in which, of course, times of elections are considered times of crisis).

Additionally, we hypothesize that (changes in) parties' crisis communication rhetoric differs proportionally, depending upon their political ideological position. Based on previous research, it can be expected that the communication by political parties at the endings of the political spectrum (i.e. more 'extreme' ideologies) is more emotive and audience-oriented than the communication by parties at the centre of the spectrum (De

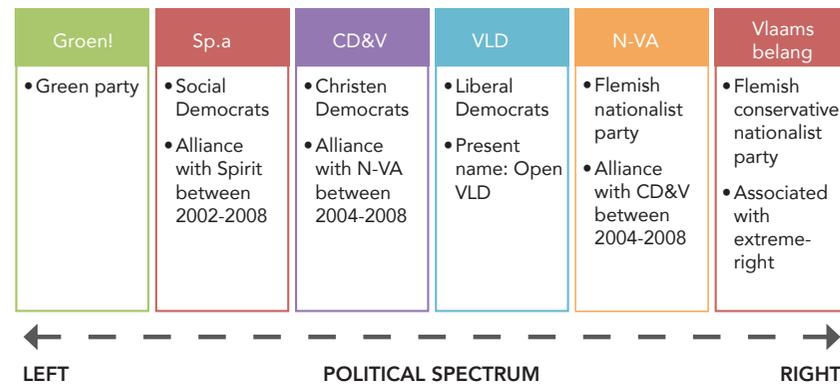
Landtsheer, 1994, 2007). Rhetoric by 'the extremes' usually contains a higher metaphor power index (De Landtsheer, 1998b, 2009) and lower integrative complexity (Suedfeld et al., 1977, 1988). We expect more empathic modal use as well in the rhetoric by these 'extreme' parties. However, theory suggests that 'content modals' will rather be used by totalitarian leaders who do not require support, whereas politicians in electoral democracies, who are trying to mobilize citizens, will rather use epistemic or speech-act modals (Anderson, 1998). Furthermore, the differences in crisis communication style between the parties at the political spectrum are expected to be bigger in crisis time than in non-crisis time.

H2: The CCC-index of crisis communication style varies between parties at the political spectrum, noting that:

- 1.1. Both in crisis and in non-crisis time the CCC-value of parties at the endings of the political spectrum is significantly higher than parties at the centre
- 1.2. The difference in CCC-values between political parties is significantly higher in crisis time than in non-crisis time

Crisis in Flanders

The aim of this study is to test this theoretical framework in different Flemish-Belgian cases. This research contains two studies, in which we use three examples of political crises in Flanders, i.e. the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. First, we were interested in actual political 'crises' in Flanders. Belgium is known for its complex governmental structure^v, due to the country's division into different (language) areas of administrative legislatures and the absence of unanimity in administrative matters. As a consequence, certain policy issues regarding this complexity have become continuous and compelling events on the political agenda, which (eventually) evolve to a climax that is regarded a 'crisis' situation. In this study two examples of 'crisis' situation in Flemish politics have been adopted: the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) issue and the DHL crisis. In the second study we are interested in the contrast between elections and non-election periods. Therefore, the changes in rhetoric of politicians before and after the Flemish Parliament elections have been analysed. In the figure below (Figure 3.1) the political spectrum of Flanders' Parliament is displayed (see also Appendix A).

Figure 3.1: Flanders' simplified political spectrum of ideology (in 2001-2012)

Study 1: two political crises in the Flemish parliament

Selection of cases and data

Case 1: Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV)

The geographical area Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (often abbreviated to BHV) is an electoral constituency and a judicial arrondissement, consisting of Belgium's capital and its surrounding area (of which Halle and Vilvoorde are its two biggest suburbs). BHV is in multiple ways an exceptional constituency: it is the only electoral district that spans two regions (Brussels-Capital Region and Flemish Brabant) and that consist of both a bilingual – French- and Dutch-speaking – part (Brussels-Capital Region) and a monolingual – Dutch-speaking – area (Flemish Brabant). The BHV district, consequently, is under the authority of both the Flemish and the Walloon administrations. The difficulties in both administrative and linguistic ways lead to conflicts at a policy level (*Res Publica*, 2004, 2005). Moreover, due to the bilingualism in the region of Brussels (although the region is officially completely enclosed in Flemish territory), all inhabitants of the BHV district have the right to vote for Walloon parties in federal elections, i.e. also the French-speaking citizens living in monolingual Dutch-

speaking Halle-Vilvoorde (in region Flemish Brabant). However, Dutch-speaking Belgians living in the monolingual Francophone *Walloon Brabant* (on the other side of Brussels), for example, are not allowed to vote for Flemish parties in the federal elections. The inequality of this administrative regulation eventually became a violation of the Constitution after changes in electoral districts were made after the 2003 federal elections. The Flemish (parties) decided that a split of the BHV district was necessary (contrary to the opinion of the French-speaking part) and all parties added this point to their election programs ahead of the 2004 Flemish Parliament elections. However, after the elections, the different parties had their own interpretations of how this could be achieved and the BHV crisis became part of further precarious negotiations that finally ended in 2012.

Case 2: DHL

The second crisis that will be analysed is the conflict that started in September 2004 between Belgian politicians about the overnight flights by the international express mail service company DHL, which at that time had its European home station at Brussels International Airport. The conflict started with disagreement about the regulation of noise pollution caused by DHL flights overnight. However, the disagreement was not limited to conflict about environment versus economic interest, but expanded to a conflict about hierarchy and authority on different political levels (Flemish versus Federal government) (*Res Publica*, 2004, 2005).

Data selection

The BHV and DHL crises both lasted for multiple years and therefore cover broad periods. As a result, the selection of a non-crisis period is rather complicated, because the crises were entwined in politicians' discourse. Since equal numbers of words in each time period are required for comparative analysis in the CCC-method, it was necessary to select a broad period of non-crisis as well. Different from the second study we do not use written interviews with politicians (because of the difficulty of search and selection in this broad period) but official reports of open plenary meetings of the Flemish Parliament. The advantage of using these reports is that the subjects can be filtered precisely. Besides, within the plenary Flemish Parliament meetings all different political parties, both affiliated with government and opposition, are more or less equally

represented in the debates (which means sufficient data for all represented parties). The collected data from the interviews and the plenary meetings are nevertheless comparable, because of the fact that both cases use only direct quotes – thus exact words – from the politicians. The plenary reports are obtained from the official website of the Flemish Parliament (<http://www.vlaamsparlement.be>). Regarding the BHV crisis, we selected nine reports for the period 2001 to 2005 (one from 2001, three for 2004, and five for 2005), depending on whether they answered the search for ‘BHV’ related debates in the meetings. The non-crisis that we connected to this crisis period contains reports from periods preceding the BHV crisis. Reports from six plenary meetings between 2000 and 2002, in which the subject ‘BHV’ is not mentioned in any way, represent the non-crisis period. For the DHL case, nine reports from the period 2003 to 2005 were selected. For the related non-crisis period two 2004 reports turned out to be sufficient for comparison.

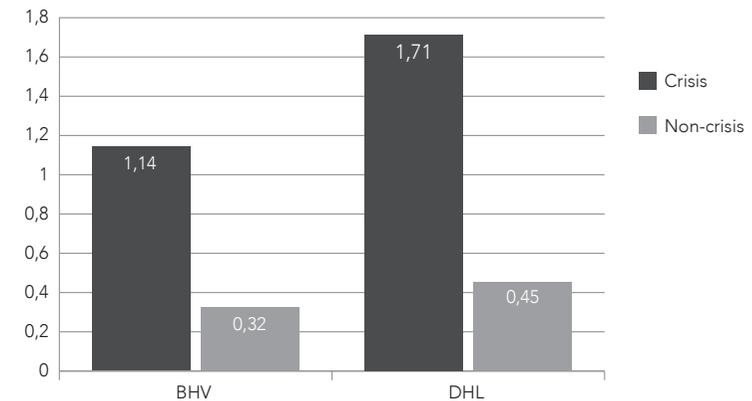
Results study 1

Regarding the BHV issue the CCC-index is $CCC_{crisis} = 1.14$ during crisis and $CCC_{non-crisis} = 0.32$ in non-crisis time (see Figure 3.2), which is a significant difference ($p < .001$). The metaphor power index during crisis is $C_{crisis} = 4.59$; the outside crisis index is $C_{non-crisis} = 1.95$. The crisis communication expresses itself through the metaphor use in a high frequency and intensity of metaphors, with the use of many strong metaphors. The ‘crisis use’ of modal verbs supports the hypotheses of politicians’ increasing empathic use of modals during crisis time ($E+_{crisis} = 0.30$ versus $E+_{non-crisis} = 0.25$), and the lower content use of modals compared to non-crisis time (respectively $E-_{crisis} = 0.72$ and $E-_{non-crisis} = 0.76$), although these differences are relatively small. Finally, the average crisis-time integrative complexity (on the 7-scale) is $CC_{crisis} = 1.68$, while the non-crisis average counts up to $CC_{non-crisis} = 2.01$. As we expected, politicians used significantly less complex language when the BHV debacle reached its climax.

The case of DHL shows relatively similar outcomes. The CCC index during crisis is $CCC_{crisis} = 1.71$, the non-crisis CCC index is $CCC_{non-crisis} = 0.45$ ($p < .001$) (Figure 3.2). The politicians’ crisis communication pattern suggests that the DHL case is perceived as a bigger crisis than the BHV issue: the DHL crisis not only reaches a higher level of crisis rhetoric ($CCC_{crisis_DHL} = 1.71$ versus $CCC_{crisis_BHV} = 1.14$), this case shows also a

bigger gap between crisis and non-crisis. The average frequency of the content use of modals is, as hypothesized, more elevated in the non-crisis ($E-_{non-crisis} = 1.01$) than in crisis time ($E-_{crisis} = 0.90$), in contrast to the emphatic use of modals (respectively $E+_{non-crisis} = 0.23$ and $E+_{crisis} = 0.57$). Regarding the integrative complexity, we witness a small but significant difference between the complexity of crisis communication ($CC_{crisis} = 1.37$) and non-crisis communication ($CC_{non-crisis} = 1.49$).

Figure 3.2: CCC-index scores per crisis (study 1)

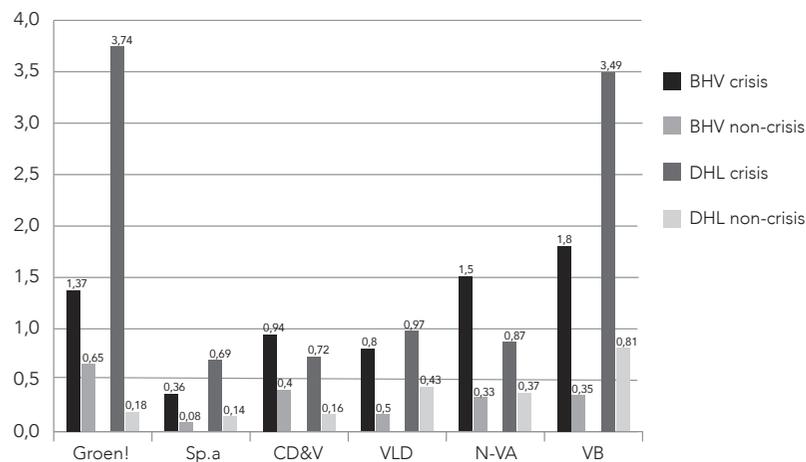


The next step in this research is to investigate a crisis pattern, by assessing the differences in communication style between different political parties. Certain clear differences in rhetorical style appear when we compare the crisis communication of the different parties in the Flemish Parliament (see Figure 3.3). At the left side, the high crisis rhetoric of the green party (*Groent!*), especially on the DHL case, stands out. At the right side of the political spectrum, the extreme right party *Vlaams Belang* (VB) achieves significantly high CCC-indices in both crises ($CCC_{crisis_BHV} = 1.80$ on an average of 1.14 at BHV, and $CCC_{crisis_DHL} = 3.49$ on an average of 1.71 at DHL). The crisis communication of VB differs from other parties in particular by the nature of its very powerful metaphors in terms of content (metaphors of violence, destruction and death). Furthermore, in non-crisis situations the communication of VB shows significant high CCC averages as well (respectively $CCC_{non-crisis_BHV} = 0.35$ on av. 0.32; $CCC_{non-crisis_DHL} = 0.81$ on av. 0.45). Especially previous to the DHL crisis it has, compared to most other political parties, almost patterns of crisis communication in non-crisis situations. We

see similar patterns in non-crisis time only at *Groen!* (BHV) ($CCC_{\text{non-crisis_BHV}} = 0.65$ on av. 0.32) and to a certain extent in general at the liberal party *VLD*^v.

Noticeable as well is the fact that VB, compared to the centre parties, expresses a much lower frequency of empathic modals, while both in crisis and non-crisis times the use of content modals is much higher. Moreover, the integrative complexity rate is significantly lower at VB than at the centre parties, which means that VB politicians compared to the majority of politicians use more simplistic language. This is not only the case in times of crisis, but in non-crisis periods as well.

Figure 3.3: CCC-index scores per crisis and political party (study 1)



The parties at the centre – Sp.a (socialists), VLD (liberals), and CD&V (Christen-Democrats) – have the particular crisis communication patterns for election versus non-election communication that we expected. The only other party that shows irregular patterns is the Flemish nationalistic N-VA. This party achieved a high CCC-index, which is mostly due to a high metaphor index, but its rhetoric differs from VB in several ways. Unlike VB, the above average metaphor index is not the result of the usage of powerful metaphor content (MC), but (especially during the BHV crisis) of a high metaphor frequency (MF).

Study 2: Flemish and European elections

Case and data selection

The case in the second study concerns the changes in political style due to elections in Flanders. Therefore, we use the elections on June 13 2004, when citizens were required to vote^{vi} for the Flemish and European Parliament^{vii}. The question that is asked is whether elections cause variation in communication style because of the increased political-social stress.

The measurement of variation in communication style takes place in different periods in time: the time right before the elections (which is regarded a stress situation), the period right after the elections (semi-stress situation) and times far beyond the elections (with no significant political events, i.e. non-stress situations). Variation in crisis communication depends on differentiation in values of the previously discussed CCC theory throughout the different periods in time. The different times are divided into four periods of four weeks each. All periods take place in 2004. The first period (t1) is January 2-28 (non-crisis), the second period (t2) is the crisis period, prior to the elections, May 16 – June 13 (election day), the third period (t3) is right after the elections, June 14- July 10 (semi-crisis), and the last period (t4) is a non-crisis time again and is October 1-28.

The type and range of the crises as described above in study 1 differ from the ‘crises in study 2. Whereas the earlier mentioned crises cover broad and barely delineated times, the ‘crisis’ in the second study has one clear ‘stress’ delineation, represented by the day of the elections on June 13, 2004. The data that are used are written interviews with Flemish policymakers and high-level (candidate) members of the Flemish Parliament. We made use of *question-answer interviews* and the so-called *straight-quote model*, so only actual quotes of the politicians are included. This resulted in a selection of 160 interviews, consisting 120,620 words. Following the CCC-method (see e.g. De Landtsheer, 2007) this is more than 60 per cent above the required 75,000 words for reliable results in this case. The interviews are extracted from the four biggest Flemish newspapers (*De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Gazet van Antwerpen*).

Results study 2

The average metaphor power (MP) in the non-election periods (t1, t3, t4) is $C_{\text{non-election}} = 10.92$, while in election time (t2) this number is $C_{\text{election}} = 13.87$, which indicates an increase of metaphor power prior to the elections, compared to other 'conventional' political times, as expected in hypothesis 1.1. We witness a significant higher score on all metaphor index indicators (frequency, intensity and content strength) in t2 than in the other periods, but the increase in the number of metaphors that are used (MF) particularly catches the eye. When the C-scores of the different political parties is examined in closer view, it becomes clear that right and thereafter centre parties show the largest metaphor power in their discourse, especially due to an increased frequency of metaphor use in the build-up to the elections.

As a next step, the use of modal verbs (E) is taken into account. In general, the analysed politicians' communication does contain more modals (of all kinds) in election times than in non-election times, but the difference is negligible ($E_{t2} = 2.03$; av. $E_{t1, t3, t4} = 1.96$). However, in this study we hypothesized that in crisis time, empathic use of modals (E+) displaces the content use of modals (E-). The use of empathic modal over content modals can be indexed by dividing the number of empathic modals by the number of content modals (E+/E-). An average index-score below 1 means that a party (or its politicians) uses more content than empathic modals, an average score above 1 means the opposite. When one considers the index for empathic use of modals in the interviews, a tendency can be seen throughout the four times (see Figure 3.4).

As the figure shows, the use of empathic modals increased heavily ahead of the elections (t2). After the elections, this number decreases gradually from $E = 1.418$ to $E = 1.243$ in the first month after the elections and restores itself similar to the original level (t1) to a value below 1 in t4. This results in the confirmation of the hypothesis that states that in times of 'political stress' (election times) politicians tend to use more empathic modals (and less content modals) than in times of 'political balance'. A similar pattern of empathic use of modals can be found when we distinguish between different political parties, although some parties show divergent patterns. The social-democratic party Sp.a has its highest E+ index score of $E_{+t4} = 1.269$ in the fourth period (t4), which is

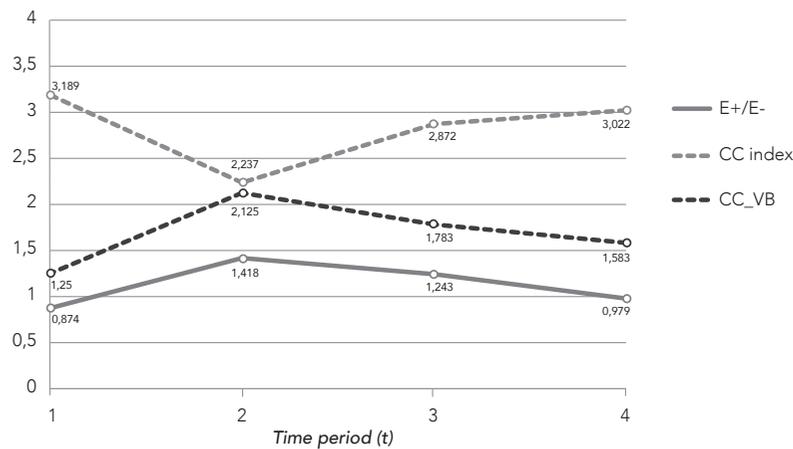
also the highest value for all other political parties at that time, whereas the liberal VLD achieved its highest score in the third period (t3). The centre parties CD&V and VLD tend to use the most empathic modals over the whole period (respectively $E_{+} = 1.219$ and $E_{+} = 1.357$), while politicians of the right-extremist party VB use the least empathic modals (av. $E_{+} = 0.787$), in contrast to content modals, which this party uses quite regularly.

We hypothesized that the third crisis communication indicator, the integrative complexity (CC), would decrease, as the political stress due to elections would rise. In other words, politicians' language becomes more simplistic in times of political stress, for example prior to elections. The average integrative complexity of all assessed communication is $CC = 2.83$. First, we can conclude that the degree of complexity of the politicians' language in general is, considering the possible maximum score of 7, rather low. We get a clearer insight when the different periods are being considered separately. In Figure 3.4 we see an inversely similar pattern as with the development of the E+/E-index. Again, the greatest difference is between the first and second times. In t1 the CC-value is 3.189, after which it declines with 13.6 per cent to the lowest CC-value that is found (2.237) in t2, the weeks ahead to the elections. Subsequently the CC-value rises slowly in t3 and t4, where it again reaches its stable value. These results confirm hypothesis 1.3: the integrative complexity of politicians' communications decreases prior to elections, compared to non-election periods. This is of importance to know, since a decrease in complexity has a clear persuasive effect on the audience: simple discourse is adopted much easier.

An analysis of the different CC-scores per political party, throughout time, reveals that most of the parties are consistent with similar integrative complexity patterns: the communication's complexity decreases ahead of the elections, but increases significantly right after the elections and reaches its stable position again in the fourth period. However, some parties deviate from this pattern. Firstly, the liberals (VLD) appear to differentiate between complex and simple rhetoric the most. The CC-value in t1 is one of the highest (only Sp.a's communication achieved a higher complexity level), but in t2 (prior to the elections) the CC-value is the lowest of all parties ($CC_{t2} = 1.83$). In the period after the elections, the complexity of the VLD's communication re-establishes to a CC-value above average. Secondly, also the Flemish nationalist party N-VA shows

differences in its degree of complexity. It appears that their communication generally contains a non-complex discourse. However, a remarkable peak top in t3 ($CC_{t3} = 3.2$) gives the N-VA's CC-index almost an average outcome, but in the fourth period the index decreases again significantly. A notable exception to the trend that all political parties show at the level of integrative complexity is *Vlaams Belang* (VB). In Figure 3.4 the dark-striped line shows that the extreme right party has the exact reversed pattern with regard to the average light-striped line of the CC index. In contrast to all other parties, its peak lays in the second period, while the CC-value in the other times is steady around $CC = 1.5$.

Figure 3.4: Average use of content (E-) versus empathic (E+) modals (E+/E-), the average integrative complexity (CC index) and specifically for *Vlaams Belang* (CC_VB) per time period (t) (study 2)



When the different political parties are being examined on their average CC-scores, a connection between the integrative complexity and the ideology, i.e. the distinction on the political spectrum, is implied. In general, a movement to the 'right' on the ideology scale means a decrease of the integrative complexity in communication (see Figure 3.5).

As Figure 3.6 shows, there is undeniably a variation in crisis rhetoric throughout the different time periods. The CCC-index in t2 ($CCC_{t2} = 9.93$), upon the election, is more than three times its value as in t1 ($CCC_{t1} = 3.15$), a non-election period. After the

elections, the CCC-index decreases significantly ($p < .01$), although the value in this semi-crisis period ($CCC_{t3} = 5.96$) is still almost twice as high as in the first (non-crisis) period. In the fourth period, the CCC-value decreases further (to $CCC_{t4} = 4.04$).

Figure 3.5: Integrative complexity (CC) on political spectrum scale (study 2)

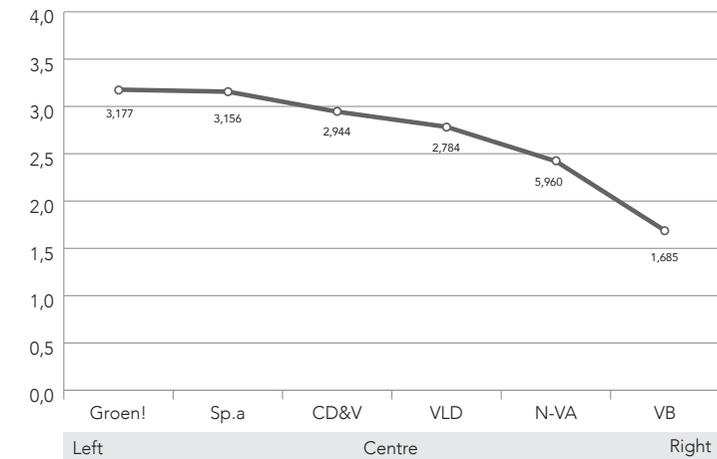
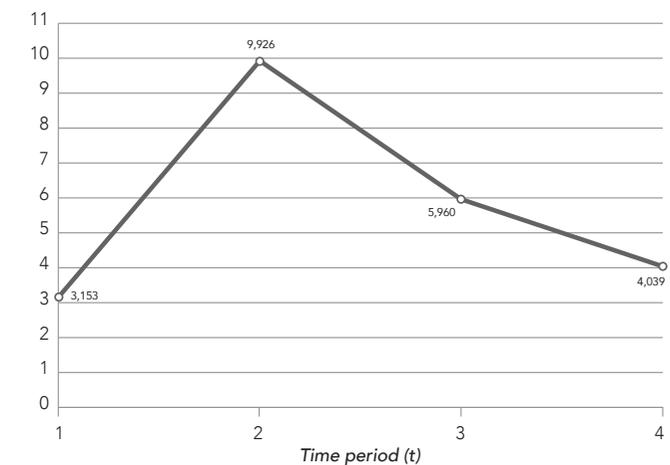


Figure 3.6: General CCC-index scores per time period (t) (study 2)



Conclusion and discussion

Crisis versus non-crisis

With the information of the three separate crisis communication indicators the total values of the CCC-index can be calculated. Hypothesis 1 predicted that the Crisis Communication Combination values by politicians is significantly higher prior to and during a crisis period than in non-crisis times. Both studies showed a very clear and significant difference in CCC-values between crisis and non-crisis situations. In the first study we compared the patterns of crisis rhetoric in two different political crisis situations, both in crisis and outside crisis time. Both cases demonstrate a change in crisis communication, and therefore in rhetoric, between periods of crisis and non-crisis. In all cases, the CCC-value in crisis time is approximately three times higher than in non-crisis time (see Figure 3.2). We can state that the crises of BHV and DHL caused a shift to more emotive, simplistic, impressive and audience-oriented language in the Flemish Parliament. This is in line with previous crisis communication research as mentioned before. So far, the results support the H1 hypotheses with reference to the differences between crisis communication and non-crisis communication. In the second study we theorized that also elections (as crisis-like situations) cause social stress for politicians, which leads to changes in certain linguistic elements of their rhetoric. As we have seen, election times clearly contribute to changes of political crisis communication style. Hypothesis 1 stands regarding to the difference in crisis communication style in elections versus non-elections^{viii}.

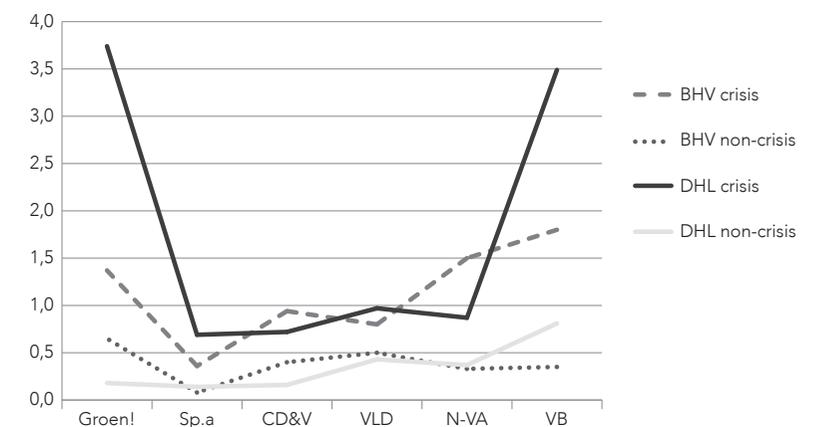
The rhetorical spectrum

The second aim of the study was to differentiate crisis communication style between different political parties. Hypothesis 2 stated that parties at the endings of the political spectrum achieve significantly higher CCC-indices than parties that are considered as centre parties, both in crisis and in non-crisis time, although the differences in crisis communication style between the parties are expected to be higher in crisis time. Figure 3.7 shows that in crisis time the CCC-value of parties at the endings of the political spectrum is significantly higher compared to parties in the centre, although

this is especially the case in the DHL crisis. In non-crisis time the differences in CCC-values between the parties of the political spectrum is less detectable. Furthermore, the differences in CCC-values between political parties are significantly higher in crisis time than in non-crisis time ($p < .001$), as stated in hypothesis 2.2.

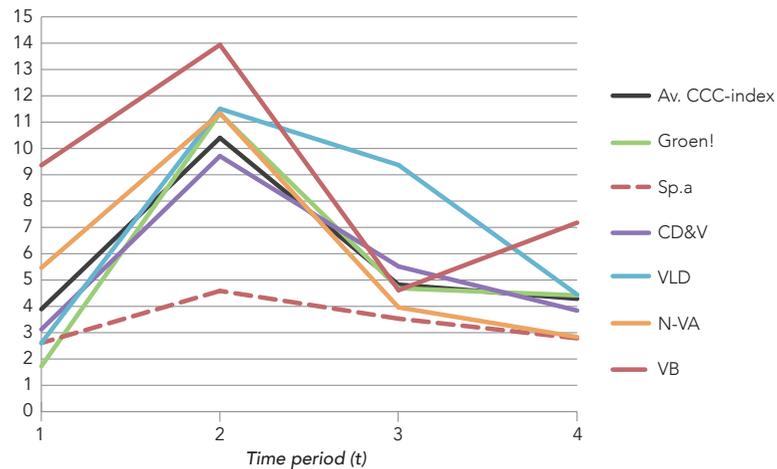
On the left side, the most left-wing party *Groen!* (the green party) shows remarkably high CCC-indices in especially the DHL crisis. In particular, this left-wing party scores high on the metaphor index (both in the crisis and the non-crisis situations). The fact that *Groen!* exhibits an outlier on the CCC-index during the DHL crisis (the highest of all, $CCC_{\text{crisis_DHL}} = 3.74$, with an average of $CCC_{\text{crisis_DHL}} = 1.71$) is somewhat explainable since the DHL crisis concerns a discussion about environmental questions (noise, pollution), subjects that rather easier bring green parties to an emotional level. On the right side, it is interesting to see that the Flemish nationalist party N-VA achieves a high CCC-index especially in the BHV case, almost as high as the extreme right VB. An explanation can be found in the same sense as that *Groen!* showed a high CCC-index in the DHL crisis: the BHV crisis dealt with delicate issues about the rights and autonomy of Flemish regions, one of the major N-VA party program issues (this applies also for VB). The party was emotionally involved on one of their main positions and used, for example, more metaphors in their language (in MF) than before.

Figure 3.7: CCC-index scores per crisis on the political spectrum (study 1)



How does this apply for the political parties in the election-as-crisis study? The figure below (Figure 3.8) displays the different CCC-index scores per political party throughout the four times in the second study. Most of the parties follow the average trend (Av. CCC-index; the black line) that begins with a low CCC-value, rises massively ahead of the crisis (elections), then decreases somewhat after the elections, and reaches (almost) its previous stable position (as in t1) in the fourth period. Exceptions can be found in the social democratic party Sp.a, which remains much more ‘flat’ in its communication over time (dotted red line), and VB that expresses an overall higher CCC index except for t3 (black line).

Figure 3.8: Average CCC-index scores per time period (t) per political party (study 2)

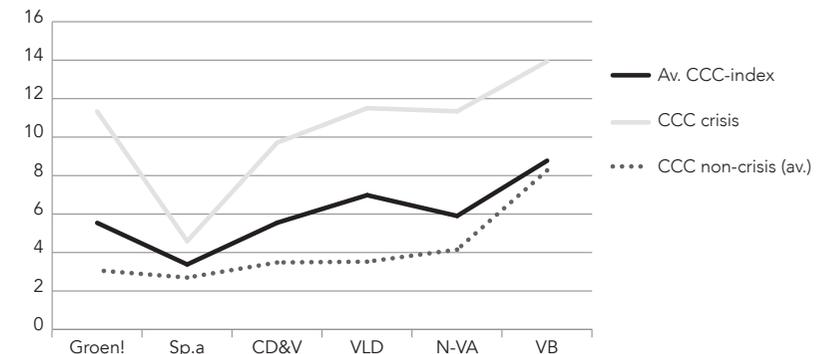


However, when we place the average CCC-indices of the different political parties on the political ‘left-right’-spectrum, we find some different results in the second study. Besides the average CCC-values, we also differentiate between crisis and non-crisis time. There are some considerations to make when analysing these outcomes. First, the average CCC-index is not a straight ascending line from left to right neither is it a parabola like the one we hypothesized (see Figure 3.9). Both the Sp.a and N-VA demonstrate lower CCC scores than the party at their left, which gives the trend line a more wavy character. This implies that there is not a linear *relationship* (or correlation) with political parties’ place on the ideological spectrum and their use of crisis rhetoric.

Based on these results, we cannot support hypothesis 2.1 in this case, because the extremes of the political spectrum do not fully transcend the centre parties in their CCC-values, although the right wing (VB) achieved the highest values, and the left wing (*Groen!*) reached much higher scores than their fellow left party Sp.a. Secondly, the differences between the parties are significantly greater in crisis time, than in non-crisis time ($p < .01$) which is in line with hypothesis 2.2. We already concluded that prior to the elections (crisis time) the CCC-indices of all parties are considerably higher than in non-election times^{ix}.

Probably the most eye-catching results are achieved by the right-extreme party VB. Altogether, both their crisis and (especially remarkable) non-crisis rhetoric is significantly higher than all other parties. For instance, the integrative complexity of VB is very low, which indicates the use of a simple political rhetoric. Not surprisingly, as this extreme right party is known for its anti-establishment ideas, whereby – in favour of the common man – ‘complex political discourse’ should be avoided (Swyngedouw, 1998; Simon-Vandenberg, 2008). Moreover, politicians of VB use the least empathic modals (av. E+ = 0.787), in contrast to content modals, which this party uses quite regularly. We previously stated that totalitarian regimes in particular make use of content modals (Anderson, 1998; De Landtsheer, 2007). The reason for this difference in modal use could be that extreme right parties have no direct need to be seen as empathic, and less open for interpretation (see also Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

Figure 3.9: CCC-index scores (elections and non-elections) on the political spectrum (study 2)



NOTES

- i Although there seems to be no clear understanding of charisma, in most literature a combination of aspects is ascribed to charismatic leadership: (physical) appearance, personality traits and certain capacities, such as expressing a clear vision and rhetorical abilities (see e.g. Hallam et al., *forthcoming*).
- ii The most powerful category of metaphors is the medical metaphors, which refer to body, death, or disease. The power of medical metaphors lies, besides the negative and pessimistic associations of illness and death, in the fact that equation with something medical implies the need for someone (a doctor, or perhaps an authoritarian leader) to 'cure' or solve the crisis, instead of – for example – treatment by democratic discussion. The second most powerful category (5) is the drama (sports, games, films) metaphors domain. Characteristic for this category is a discourse in terms of 'winning' and 'losing' that are often emotional events. Moreover, the strength of sports metaphors is often derived from the apparent harmlessness of very aggressive and manipulative expressions (such as 'offensive' or 'attack'). Another metaphor category is (4) points to violence and disaster. These metaphors express certain feelings of despair, depression or aggression. Equations of disaster often refer to anxiety and other negative emotions, but citizens may still be in control (which makes this category less powerful than the above). Technical (e.g. political and intellectual) metaphors of the value 3-category are often sophisticated metaphors that are used for simplifying complex political processes. Less powerful metaphor categories are nature metaphors (2), which are classified by their ambivalent and changeable character, and popular metaphors (1), which refer to everyday-life reality, such as popular sayings.
- iii The modals that Anderson used, are being translated into Dutch as '*moeten*' or '*dienen*' (must), '*kunnen*' (can), '*behoren*' (ought), '*mogen*' (may), and '*vereisen*' or '*nodig hebben*' (need) (Pieterse and van der Sloot, 1996, in De Landtsheer, 2007)
- iv Belgium has an extraordinary complex political structure of (language based) communities and territorial regions. The country consists of three linguistic regions, which are Dutch in Flanders, French in Walloon, and a small German-speaking part in the east. Aside from one Belgian federal government, there are several legislative powers related to each region (i.e. the governments of Wallonia, Flanders, and the German community) and additionally the governments of the French community, the Brussels-Capital Region (see e.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Belgium).
- v The fact that VLD scores high on the CCC-index in non-crisis situations is mainly the result of one outlier in the data. In one non-crisis parliamentary debate we witness the extensive and various (sport and games) metaphor use by particular politicians such as Jean-Marie Dedecker, a former sports athlete and coach. Additionally, in 2006 Dedecker had to leave VLD because of disagreement with the party leaders, which incited him in 2007 to form his own populist political party: *Lijst Dedecker* (LDD).
- vi Belgium has compulsory voting
- vii The Regional and European elections take place at the same time every five years
- viii One might notice that the CCC-scores in the second study are rather higher than in the first study. Although this seems quite remarkable, a logic explanation can be given. Because the politicians' communication in study 2 was taken from interviews and direct quotes, that kind of communication resulted in far more 'juicy' statements and opinions. The plenary Parliament reports, on the other hand, contain much more official policy statements. In other words, there is a much higher chance to find less complexity and more metaphors and modals in politicians' communication in interviews than in the official reports. Nevertheless, with respect to the comparison in and between the cases the parallels are to be recognized.

ix Again the Flemish nationalist party N-VA is an interesting case for further analysis. Overall there is a considerable difference between their crisis versus non-crisis communication style. Earlier we showed for example that their rhetoric, although generally more content-oriented, contains a non-complex discourse. A possible explanation for the varying levels of complexity is the fact that N-VA, in order to reach the electoral threshold, formed an alliance with CD&V in 2004. This cartel achieved the most votes in the Flemish elections and became the largest party. The period after the elections (t3) was dominated by the formation of a new Flemish Government and the *Cordon sanitaire* (or Quarantine line) against VB. It is probable that the N-VA communication demanded a higher standard of complexity at that time.

CHAPTER 4: THE USE OF HYPERBOLE IN POLITICAL LANGUAGE

"Hyperbole is sometimes perceived as speakers making

a 'big deal' of matters that do not deserve it"

Michael McCarthy and Ronald Carter
"There's millions of them" (2004, p. 155)

This chapter is based on the following article (submitted for publication):

Kalkhoven, L. and De Landtsheer, C. (forthcoming). The Use of Hyperbole in Political Language. Methodology of Analysing Rhetorical Exaggeration in Political Discourse in the case of Flemish-Belgian Parliamentary Debates.

Abstract

Chapter 3 showed that rhetorical differences are not only a consequence of variance between external circumstances, but results suggest that there are perpetual rhetorical differences between political parties as well. In this chapter we focus on differences in rhetoric in the long-term, daily political routine. The figurative variable of the rhetorical exaggeration (known as *hyperbole*) is used as a test case to analyse ‘ideological variances’ as an explaining factor within the rhetoric of a real-life political context.

It is often argued that political rhetoric and argumentation is characterised by a high degree of exaggeration, but so far this has never been examined empirically. The main questions in this study are how and to what extent hyperbolic rhetoric can be detected in current political language and what differences between parties (or different ideologies) exist. Based on methodological frameworks by McCarthy and Carter (2004) and Cano Mora (2009), this study established a new methodological paradigm that offers criteria that emphasize or indicate the (degree of) exceptional or extreme representations of reality, in order to identify and recognize particular (recurring) hyperboles, and assess the value (either positive or negative) of the hyperbolic evaluation. The first objective is to test this integrated methodological framework in a contemporary political case study. In a combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis, a large representable sample (>106,000 words) of debates in the Flemish Parliament, between 2006 and 2011, has been analysed. The second objective is to describe rhetorical differences in hyperbole use between political parties. Results show that both ideological and party role’s differences indicate the inherent value of the hyperbole as an explicit negative and radical rhetorical figure in political language.

THE USE OF HYPERBOLE IN POLITICAL LANGUAGE

Introduction

Hyperbole is not only one of the oldest described rhetorical figures, but also one of the most recurrent tropes in our daily discourse (Cano Mora, 2009). Hyperbole can be defined as a rhetorical style figure that is aimed at an exaggerated form of phrasing (McCarthy and Carter, 2004). Notably, the topic of hyperbole as a rhetorical figure of speech is regularly attributed in pragmatic lecture and literature, regarding the aesthetics of language, e.g. in poetry, recitation, humour. However, the scientific field of psycho-linguistics – or any other related academic field such as social or communication sciences – has basically kept aloof from the study of hyperbole in general terms, whereas systematic quantitative analysis of hyperbole is to our knowledge even completely absent as yet, assuredly in the context of political rhetoric.

In this chapter we put (new) life into the rather neglected academic study of hyperbole as a (political) rhetorical figure, by examining the level of hyperbolic language in contemporary political discourse in the political case of Flanders (Belgium), i.e. the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. The main objective of this study is to find out how and to what extent hyperbolic language can be detected in current political rhetoric and what differences in hyperbole use exist between distinguished political parties. We attempt to make a systematic analysis of the frequency of occurrence of hyperbole, combined with a qualitative exploration of the substantive variation in hyperbole use.

An anatomy of hyperbole

Hyperbole – as many other rhetorical devices that refer to figurative worlds – is based on a strict and complex semiotic-pragmatic system of mutual consensus between sender and receiver. From a psycho-linguistic perspective it is interesting how speakers use

hyperbolic language to express affective meanings (the intention of the exaggeration) and how listeners receive such acts (McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 153). In order to successfully implement such a rhetorical device, the role of the receiver is as important as the sender's. The receiver needs to be aware of the fact that a comment is meant hyperbolic, otherwise the style figure loses its pragmatic effect (Berntsen and Kennedy, 1996).

According to McCarthy and Carter (2004), it is very common for people to use all sorts of exaggeration or overstatement that are literally impossible or counterfactual in their informal or every-day talk, but interestingly, without being perceived as false or as lying. In terms of Grice's cooperative principle of communication, hyperbole and other related style figures such as irony or sarcasm, are often deliberately flouting the maxims of cooperation, whereas senders rely on their inferred *implicatures* and the obedience of the receiver to understand the underlying or implicit meaning (see e.g. Davies, 2007). "(Such) hyperbolic expressions usually pass without challenge by listeners, who accept them as creative intensifications for evaluative or affective purposes such as humour and irony, and who often make their own supportive contributions to the figure of speech" (McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 150)

Formisano (2008) stated that political language is characterized by a high degree of 'hysterical' rhetoric, which implies that political actors and groupings, whether or not unconsciously, frequently use hyperbole in their daily political language. Hyperbole appears to be a suitable instrument for politicians to manage their language in different ways. Politicians seem eager to exaggerate statements in order to empower their argument. Arguably, considering the persuasive purpose of political discourse in the debate and towards the electorate, the intentional use of hyperboles can be a strategic, non-substantive tool for persuasion. Ritter (2010) argues that a hyperbole is a stylish way in order to make people see 'the truth' with the use of a deceptive exaggeration imbued with *pathos*. The rhetorical effect is that it appeals to the emotions of the audience, as well as that it is used by speakers in order to empower their own emotions and to express their deceptions and irritations (Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010). In general, people have a natural tendency to exaggerate situations in search for attention and recognition (Ritter, 2010). The (intentional) rhetorical use of (an) exaggeration in language serves as a figurative and extreme evaluation of a situation and is therefore

often a misleading or false representation of reality (Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010). The fact that hyperboles (re)shape reality in a certain way makes them powerful tools for persuasion (e.g. Swartz, in McCarthy and Carter, 2004). Hypothetically, the occurrence of hyperbole should be prominent in political language, but it is uncertain to what extent and how it is used. The absent study of hyperbole in the political case is therefore rather peculiar.

As figurative expressions of reality, hyperboles are often perceived as part of (or compared to) other rhetorical devices. It comes as no surprise that most literature on the understanding (and effects) of hyperbole finds its inspiration in other figures of speech, such as irony, sarcasm, understatement, rhetorical questions and metaphorical language (*cf.* Gibbs, 1994; Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; Colston and Keller, 1998; Haiman, 1998; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010; Ritter, 2010). Many of these and other rhetorical figures are placed in a similar category as for the pragmatic functions that they perform. Naturally, understatement (*meiosis*) and overstatement or hyperbole' (*auxesis*) are often regarded as counterparts on the same rhetorical scale, whereas Gibbs (1994) notes that both hyperbole and understatement are closely related to irony in traditional rhetoric "in that each misrepresents the truth" (p. 391). One linking characteristic between hyperbole (and understatement) and irony is what Kreuz and Roberts (1995) call 'nonveridicality', a discrepancy between description and reality. Irony, understatement and hyperbole derive their rhetorical effect mostly from the contrast (or contradiction) and (therefore) the surprise that they achieve (Colston and Keller, 1998; Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b). Contrast is, according to Atkinson (1984), one of the main rhetorical devices in political speech that causes an almost immediate effect (measured in the form of applause) on an audience. Comprehension of these figures of speech thus appears to rely upon an 'inflation of the discrepancy' between expected and ensuing events (*cf.* Colston, 1997). Colston and O'Brien (2000a, 2000b) prove, however, a variance in magnitude of effect, in which hyperbole and irony are found to have a larger effect of creating contrast than for instance a literal commentary or understatement, and therefore are more successful in achieving related pragmatic goals, such as specifically, humour, condemnation and pointing out the unexpected (Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, p. 1575). Robert and Kreuz (1994) analysed the specific goals of different rhetorical figures (according to the users) and concluded that hyperbole is mainly used to clarify statements, but to a great extent also to emphasize a certain point and to add a humorous

effect. Often hyperbolic statements are used in an ironical way to express something intentionally exorbitantly and/or humorously to make a point (Colston and O'Brien, 2000b), although it mostly depends on the listener how the utterance is being perceived. Both hyperbole and irony can either be perceived as humour, but sometimes it can also be insulting and taken personally. Leggitt and Gibbs (2000) showed for instance that listeners' reception of different rhetorical devices varies, with more negative affect being created by overstatement and sarcasm than by irony, understatement and satire. "Hyperbole is sometimes perceived as speakers making a 'big deal' of matters that do not deserve it" (McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 155).

Norrick (2004) emphasizes the difference between (simple) extreme case formulations (ECF) and hyperbole. Hyperbole can be non-extreme and is rhetorical in nature, whereas ECF is a sub-category of hyperbole. ECF's do often make clear that a non-literal statement is made and establish signals of emotional involvement through an exaggerated formulation (2004, p. 1730). Norrick further points out that non-extreme hyperbole is very closely related to metaphor. Many metaphors indeed contain a certain degree of overstatement (although hyperboles are not always metaphorical). One expression can therefore be both a metaphor and a hyperbole (and/or an other style figure). The fact that exaggerations or overstatements mostly depend on their context and interact with other related style figures, such as idioms, metaphors, synecdoche, simile, and so on (e.g. Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; Ritter, 2010), makes identification sometimes challenging. Moreover, similar to metaphors and other figures of speech, a large number of them have become 'conventionalized' or even 'dead' so that in many cases we are unaware of the rhetorical exaggeration (McCarthy and Carter, 2004). Illustrating this, McCarthy and Carter name the expressions '*for ages*' (simply meaning 'for a long time') and '*dying to*' (e.g. 'dying to meet someone' – as a way of expressing the fact that one has an eager desire for something) as examples of 'dead' hyperboles, due to the frequency and conventionality of both expressions (2004, p. 151). Although it is almost tangible that language in general is packed with hyperbole, the difficulty lies yet in the detection of rhetorical exaggeration (McCarthy and Carter, 2004).

To a methodological framework of measuring hyperbole

In this study we combine a quantitative methodology and a qualitative examination of the variation in use of rhetorical exaggeration. The advantage of a quantitative part is that it enables us to detect (the frequency of) hyperbole with high ecological and construct validity, i.e. in real-life political communication in a systematic and objective way. Subsequently, this approach allows also for objective comparative measures between different political parties and their positions in parliament, as well as for evolution over time. The qualitative analysis focuses on the theoretical rhetorical purposes of hyperbole and attempts to bridge the gap of the insights in rhetorical effect and the use of particular forms of hyperbole.

Hyperbole acquires its meaning and relevance mostly from its linguistic and social context. Therefore, in order to identify a hyperbole, we need to consider criteria that emphasize or indicate the (degree of) deviation in respect to the standards that define the literal in its linguistic (surrounding words/sentences) or social (real world) contexts. McCarthy and Carter (2004) provide such a (very useful) list of criteria that would make identification of hyperbole possible. The authors sum up eight basic related conditions: disjunction (oddness) with the context, shift in footing, counterfactuality, the depicting of impossible worlds, a listener take-up, extreme case formulation, syntactic support, and relevant interpretability (2004, pp. 162-163; see also Chapter 2).

Additionally, there are various categories of hyperbole and multiple cues (such as recurring keywords of extreme case formulations) that can indicate exaggeration in text or speech. Cano Mora (2009) argues that we can divide types of hyperbole into determined semantic fields (shared components of similar semantic ideas or meanings, e.g. *synonymy*), which can be facilitated with cognate keywords. This quantitative framework (see Chapter 2: Table 2.1 for a full overview) makes it easier to detect and recognize particular (recurring) hyperboles. Cano Mora (2009) distinguishes four semantic subfields of so-called *purity*, namely (1) the idea of completeness and absoluteness (using 'keywords' such as completely, absolute(ly), total(ly), entirely), (2) the idea of universality or non-exceptionality (e.g. all, always, everywhere, everyone, everything, anything), (3) the idea of non-existence and nullity (e.g. no, nobody, nothing

(else), never, not at all), and (4) the idea of veracity (e.g. literally, beyond any doubt, definitely). Moreover, one can add a quantity semantic subfield which involves numbers and (other) standardized measure units, such as time measures (e.g. periods, times; a second, an hour, years, months and months, ages, etcetera), length or linear measures (e.g. inches, kilometres, light year) and all other numerical expressions (e.g. a dozen, hundreds, thousands, millions, billions, etc.), as well as words that imply a certain quantity (e.g. loads (of), lots, etc.). Finally, the author acknowledges the semantic subfield of magnitude, which is either the idea of greatness (e.g. big, huge, tremendous, enormously, immense, massive, giant, forever, and so on) or the idea of smallness (e.g. little, tiny, minuscule, instantly, and so on) (Cano Mora, 2009, pp. 30-31).

The combination of the determined semantic field of hyperbolic keywords by Cano Mora (2009), together with the list of criteria by McCarthy and Carter (2004) gives us a useful starting point in order to detect hyperboles and distinguish hyperbolic from non-hyperbolic language, because it is more profound than the identification of standard keywords (such as ECF) alone. Earlier we pointed out the importance of the receiver in 'accepting' the hyperbole in phrases, and several of the eight criteria seem to depend (mostly) on the receiver's response as well (e.g. shift in footing, listener take-up). However, in this study we aim to develop a quantitative methodological instrument in order to detect hyperbole in real-life communication, objectively and systematically, but also at a distance, generalizable and comparative, which means that the instrument should be applicable for every sort of communication (debates, speeches, interviews, etc.). In many cases, including the data that is used in the present study, there is a lack of (excess to the) receiver's response. Additionally, we argued that hyperbole is often strongly related to other figures of speech (these are mostly metaphorical in nature), but that in most studies these figurative exaggerations are overlooked and hyperbole is often seen as ECF only. Therefore we opt for inclusion of a second group of hyperbole: the (non-extreme) figurative enlargements. Therefore, it was needed to develop a methodology with quantifiable content analysis criteria. In order to accomplish this, we follow three relatively simple steps (derived from the criteria by McCarthy and Carter, 2004). The first step is to look for extreme case formulations, intensifiers, keywords and (other) syntactical support, for which the list of keywords by Cano Mora (2009) is particularly useful, but we also look for figurative (often metaphorical) intensifications. Step two is to test the ECF or figurative enlargements to the disjunction with the context

and other criteria that still can be derived from the list of McCarthy and Carter's (2004) framework (counterfactuality, impossibility). The last step is a check-up of the relevant interpretability of the trope, which means that the utterance should make sense. We formulate three basic criteria to which a phrase can be classified as being hyperbolic:

- 1) A phrase or sentence contains (at least one) hyperbole as a rhetorical figure of speech in which reality is expressed in exaggerated or overstated form. This is often assignable due to the presence of ECF, and other syntactical support, but it can also be a figurative (metaphorical) exaggeration;
- 2) It has (as by definition) to be an extremity or enlargement (in stylistics also known as *auxesis*). The phrase is in a sense odd in its context (a disjunction), and/or there is an expression of unlikelihood or impossibility (counterfactuality), or the utterance is even simply untrue (thus false) (McCarthy and Carter, 2004);
- 3) There is an indication of 'realistic sense', which means that it is clear that the utterance is not meant as nonsense (e.g. rubbish, absurdism, or purposely lying).

Although it allows for the classification of hyperbole without directly regarding the listener's reaction, for all criteria it is essential to see the phrase in its context. In most cases the difference between hyperbolic and non-hyperbolic keywords is, considering the criteria, reasonably assignable. For example, when a politician speaks of economic cutbacks in terms of *millions of euros*, this can be taken rather literally. There is no evidence of disjunction with its context, no sense of impossible or counterfactual statements, no particular syntactic support. On the other hand, if the politician would say that he (or she) could think of *millions of reasons* why making economic cutbacks is a bad idea, the phrase should rather be perceived figuratively. It is very unlikely that someone is capable of thinking of millions of reasons at one moment, it is an extreme case formulation (in the semantic subfield of quantity), counterfactual (impossible), and is dissimilar to the normal (political) context (even if possible, pragmatically speaking no one would literally name millions of reasons in a political debate or speech) although the phrase does make perfect sense. In this latter case, consequently, there is clear evidence of hyperbole.

Hyperbole value

Apart from the quantitative identification of hyperbole, it would be interesting to categorize them based on intrinsic criteria. Van Dijk (1993b) pointed out that hyperbole seems to suit the categorization criteria of polarization in which either the positive or the negative is emphasized. Yet, earlier it was argued that hyperbole is associated with negative affect on the receiver (Leggitt and Gibbs, 2000). Moreover, according to Colston and O'Brien (2000b), a hyperbole is often a (very) negative evaluation of a (moderately) negative situation. However, if the literal situation is evaluated (moderately) positive, then the exaggeration is inevitably positively expressed as well. Rhetorically speaking, it matters significantly how a certain situation is evaluated. Usually, negative evaluations express undesirable, unexpected and dangerous circumstances that subsequently can arouse 'negative emotions', such as anxiety, fear, anger or envy (Marcus, 2003). Positively expressed utterances, which are more desirable and expected, are therefore likely to arouse more 'positive feelings', such as happiness, relief, reassurance or satisfaction. The purpose of use of hyperbole can thus be moving in two different directions. Whereas several scholars emphasize that hyperboles are often used for clarification or for making a point through an ironic or humorous exaggeration (positive use), they can also be perceived (and received) negatively, which can be the effect of using the figure of speech in an offensive or insulting way, for example as a(n) (personal) attack (negative use).

Cano Mora (2009) emphasizes also that the evaluation of the speaker's emotions and attitudes, whether positive or negative, towards the object or situation, is important to examine. She provides a classification of hyperboles, based on certain major semantic subfields, into positive and negative evaluation. The positive hyperbolic evaluation conveys the speaker's approval, admiration or praise, and therefore expresses always certain semantic fields of kindness or gentlenessⁱⁱ, e.g. something good can be described as 'excellent' or 'brilliant', something important as 'vital'. Negative hyperbole use expresses disapproval, criticism and condemnationⁱⁱⁱ, e.g. something bad or unwanted can be labelled as 'the worst', 'a (total) mess', or 'horrible'.

Operationalization

Procedure and data-selection

In this research we make a content analysis of the use of hyperbole in real-world political communication, which in this study is the Flemish (Belgian) political case. For the first time, to our belief, it is attempted to establish a quantitative measure of the frequency of hyperbole use in (political) speech. The first aim is to detect hyperbolic expressions in the political language by using the methodological framework as described above. Subsequently the study has, besides a quantitative component, a qualitative one as well, once we focus more profoundly on the way that different politicians and parties use specific (categories of) hyperboles. The qualitative part aims at distinguishing different types of hyperbole, within the categories of this rhetorical figure as differentiated by Cano Mora (2009), and hyperboles within categories of other rhetorical variables, as we argued, such as irony and humour versus insults and (personal) attacks, as well as the positive and negative categorization, and the rhetorical effects of contrast and surprise. Additionally, we explore recurring patterns and characteristics differentiated between different political parties.

For the quantitative analysis we are measuring two variables: the quantity of hyperbole use (hyperbole frequency) and the either positive or negative evaluation of the hyperboles that have been used (hyperbole value). The hyperbole frequency is measured by conducting the average or *ratio* of hyperbole use (HB-ratio) in a certain text sample. The ratio is measured by calculating the number of overstatements per 100 words.

$$\sum \text{HB-ratio} = \frac{n(\text{HB})}{n(\text{w})} \times 100$$

The either positive or negative evaluation of the hyperboles, the value of hyperbole (HB-value), is measured by calculating the ratio (or share) of negative and positive hyperboles in a text sample, divided by the total number of hyperboles in the text sample. When +1 is added to this outcome, scores are generated on a scale between 0 and 2, in which '0' is being completely positive, '1' is neutral (neither positive or negative) and '2' is being entirely negative. In sum:

$$\sum \text{HB-value} = \frac{n(\text{HB}_{\text{negative}}) - n(\text{HB}_{\text{positive}})}{\text{Total } n(\text{HB})} + 1$$

For this content analysis data is used that is reduced to communication outings directly originating from politicians in Flanders (Belgium), the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. Therefore, parliamentary debates between 2006 and 2011 have been selected and analysed. The website of the Flemish parliament (www.vlaamsparlement.be) contains a database in which reports and related items concerning all parliamentary debates and meetings from 1995 up to present day are stored and possible to be consulted. The website also provides a searching system that allows to select only reports of general parliamentary debates (between 2006-2011). From all data that was available, a general sample has been randomly selected (every first debate on each new online page). This resulted in a total number of 135 text samples^{iv}, containing just above 106,000 words of analysable data (average of 787 words per text sample), approximately equally fragmented between (the most important) different political parties in the Flemish (regional) parliament^v. This is expected to be a representative sample of Flemish political debates. Political parties that were included in this study are (from left to right): the environmentalists (*Groen*), the social democrats (Sp.a), the Christian democrats (CD&V), the liberal democrats (Open VLD), the Flemish nationalists (N-VA), the populists (LDD), and the extreme right (*Vlaams Belang*, VB) (see for further details: Appendix A).

The decree that hyperbole often depends on its surrounding, context and other style figures leads to the conclusion that hyperbole (as many other rhetorical figures) can hardly be incorporated into a mass-scale, computer-generic content analysis: hyperbole cannot be captured into prearranged keywords alone. Therefore, different coders have executed the entire data collection and analysis manually. In our attempt to detect the frequency and value of hyperbole, the quantitative coding has been tested and re-tested repeatedly. The initial database of text samples has been analysed according to a coding scheme (see Appendix C: Tables C.3 and C.4) by the authors, after a series of pre-tests in order to test the validity and usefulness of the instrument regarding the quantitative identification and value scoring of hyperboles. The coding scheme contained an introduction and the definition of hyperbole as described above, a checklist for the three major criteria, divided into subcriteria, and a list of keywords (according to Cano Mora,

2009) as a back up, and the occasion to classify the value of a discovered hyperbole as positive, negative or neutral. The *inter-rater reliability* indicated an increasing agreement (using Cohen's Kappa, to a maximum just below $\kappa = .60$, after the series of pre- and post-tests, which can be seen as a moderate agreement according to Landis and Koch, 1977), but this agreement may still be not entirely satisfactory. Therefore, the last stage of data collection was the re-coding analysis of the entire corpus, serving as a second opinion of wrongfully coded or missed hyperboles. The interpretation of hyperbolic categorization and content (the qualitative part) has been executed by the authors, using in-depth rhetorical content analysis. It is by no means intended to make all-embracing or generalizable conclusions on the qualitative content analysis part, but it does provide a useful overview of differences in hyperbole use. Finally, if one was not certain whether something is meant hyperbolically or not, we followed the rule by McCarthy and Carter that 'borderline cases occur which have to be excluded' (2004, p. 163). All examples used in this study are translated from Dutch by the author, and the coded hyperboles are underlined.

Recurring signs of hyperbole identification

In most of the cases it is understandable *that* certain expressions are hyperbolic (or not), although it could cause some confusion *why* some cases are and some cases are not hyperbolic. In example [1], for instance, it should be made clear that {c}'*every*[body]' is a hyperbole, whereas {a}'*every* [administration]' is not. Both examples contain 'extreme case formulation (or intensification) by the use of the word 'every', if we follow the methodological framework. However, the first (everybody) implies a disjunction with the context and counterfactuality (since not every single citizen in the world will be aware of the supposed severe situation), while the latter is not only likely to be meant literally, but also consistent with the supposed reality (considering the fact that if the statement is true – 'confronted with crucial challenges' – then it will apply for all the different administrations, even though the word 'crucial' itself is hyperbolic).

[1] 'Not only Flanders, but {a} every administration in this country and even in other countries, will be confronted with three {b} crucial challenges (...). It is clear for {c} everybody that this is a severe situation (...)' (Peeters, Christian democrat CDE&V, 28/09/09)

A similar interesting case is example [2]. The word ‘literally’ is, according to McCarthy and Carter (2004), ‘one of those intensifiers’ that are regularly used hyperbolic in a general context, although it implies a contradiction in terms. It is conventionalized that the use of ‘literally’ is often counterfactual, precisely as a way to stress the acceptance of the figuratively. Of course, the politician in this example could indeed *literally* have fallen over backwards, but considering the metaphorical nature and the disjunction in context (the ‘oddness’ or ‘irregularity’ of the action in those circumstances), that is very unlikely.

[2] ‘I *literally* fell over backwards’ (De Knop, liberal democratic *Open VLD*, 27/10/10)

Another (very obvious) sign of identification can be found in cases in which speakers themselves already emphasize the fact that they use hyperbolic language. This kind of ‘precaution’ that is taken, although somewhat paradoxically to the expression of those ‘absolute convictions’, is revealed for example by ‘government parties’ such as CD&V (Christian democrats), who tend to tone down or euphemize their own exaggeration at some point (see for instance example [6]).

Results: hyperbole in the Flemish parliament

There are several interesting results to conceive regarding distinctions in rhetorical exaggeration between different parties (party ideologies) and the role that parties or politicians have in the parliament. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the average hyperbole use, in frequency (HB-ratio) and in value (HB-value), differentiated among the political parties in the Flemish parliament. The hyperbole frequency, as measured by the number of overstatements per 100 words of text in the political debates, shows a general average of HB-ratio = .64 hyperboles per 100 words. The HB-value is the either positive (value < 1) or negative (value > 1) evaluation of a situation that is expressed hyperbolically. We see that the general evaluation of hyperbole value HB-value = 1.25, which means that hyperboles are, as expected, more often used to express something negatively than positively.

Table 4.1: General hyperbole ratio and hyperbole value of different political parties in Flemish parliamentary debates (2006-2011)

Ideological spectrum	Political party	HB-ratio*	HB-value
Left	Groen (environmentalists)	.57	1.43
	Sp.a (social democrats)	.40	1.15
Centre	CD&V (Christian democrats)	.27	1.03
	Open VLD (liberal democrats)	.56	1.28
Right	N-VA (Flemish nationalists)	.54	1.03
	LDD (populists)	.99	1.40
Extreme right	Vlaams Belang (extreme right)	1.16	1.43
Total average		.64	1.25

N=135 text samples (or 106,237 words)

* $p < .05$ (Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test)

Interestingly, there is a substantial correlation between the frequency and the value of hyperbole use. A standard bivariate Pearson Correlation test indicates a significant (moderate) positive correlation score of $r = .40$ ($p < .01$). Figure 4.1 reveals the parallel pathways that the hyperbole ratio and value follow when both are placed on a political spectrum of the different parties in Flemish politics. This result demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the frequency and the evaluation of hyperbole, i.e. an increase in the number of hyperboles means a more negative evaluation.

Figure 4.1: Relationship between general hyperbole ratio (frequency) and hyperbole value (positive-negative) per party in Flemish parliamentary debates (2006-2011)



Differences in semantic subfields

Particular hyperboles are used much more often than others. In reference to the different semantic subfield, as stated by Cano Mora (2009), almost all exaggeration is situated in the field of *purity* (i.e. completeness/absoluteness, universality/non-exceptionality, non-existence/nullity, and veracity) and to a lesser degree in the field of *magnitude* (and only in greatness, not in smallness). Surprisingly, the subfields of quantity and numerical exaggeration hardly ever occur (only about 5% of all hyperboles).

Words of exaggeration within the subfield of purity, like several expressions of absoluteness, imply the lack of alternatives, state absolute truths and leave no room for discussion or counter-argumentation, because the statement directly tells the listener that, for instance, something has always/never been so, everyone/no one believes that, and there are no exceptions. This pattern occurs in many political discourses, as is illustrated by the following example [3]:

[3] 'Good governing is {a} out of the question. I think {b} no one needs to be convinced of that. (De Meulemeester, liberal democrat *Open VLD*, 27/10/10)

Thus, a particular (negative) discourse is being settled in only two sentences, as there is no room for discussion [{a}'out of the question'] (as in: out of order), and since the bad or undesirable situation is established, it is also the absolute truth, because it is presumed that everybody thinks so [{b}'no one needs to be convinced']. Although this example of 'absolute convictions' is characteristic for the (mildly) hyperbolic discourse of Open VLD, it is certainly not reserved exclusively to the liberal party. This kind of exaggeration, which is often characterized by – and therefore closely related to – simple extreme case formulations (e.g. 'all', 'everybody', 'always'), is most occurring within all discourses in the Flemish political hyperbolic language. Commonly used overstatements are situated in these categories, as the following examples from the three major establishment parties show:

[4] 'We've {a} always been saying that... (...). I think that {b} all members are impressed' (Ceysens, liberal democrat *Open VLD*, 23/06/10)

[5] 'Some completely lose track today.' (Robeyns, social democrat *Sp.a*, 27/10/11)

[6] 'The federal government can forget it, to *express this strongly*, to (...)' (PM Peeters, Christian democratic *CDE&V*, 23/06/10)

This latter example [6] is rather characteristic for the moderate tone in the political discourse of the Christian democratic centre-party CD&V, which achieves the lowest hyperbole ratio of all parties when the frequency per 100 words is measured (see Table 4.1): an average of .27 hyperbolic words per 100 words. They also achieve, along with the Flemish nationalistic N-VA, the lowest hyperbole value (HB-value = 1.03), which means that they are least negative in their overstatements (though still slightly more negative than positive). Importantly, as we will see, the Christian democratic party CD&V is, during the selected time period, continuously part of the Flemish government.

The other party that is exclusively part of the Flemish government is the social democratic party Sp.a. They achieve the second lowest hyperbole ratio score (.40 hyperboles per 100 words). Also the Sp.a uses hyperbole notably frequent with precaution. It comes to the attention that there is a significant difference in hyperbole value ($p < .05$) between members of the parliament and members of the government (respectively HB-values of 1.28 versus .73) among Sp.a politicians. Illustrative, there is a high number of positively formulated overstatements by Sp.a-ministers. However, naturally, particular situations

are unbecoming for a positive tone, and the circumstances ask for a more severe attitude. The way of expressing negative feelings degenerate recurrently into a form of metaphorical exaggeration that can be described as a pessimistic and gloomy view on the political practice, for example:

[7] 'Last Tuesday [...] was a {a} black day in the history of the European Union' (...) 'If this goes on, every initiative will be {b} doomed' (De Loor, social democratic *Sp.a*, 18/06/08)

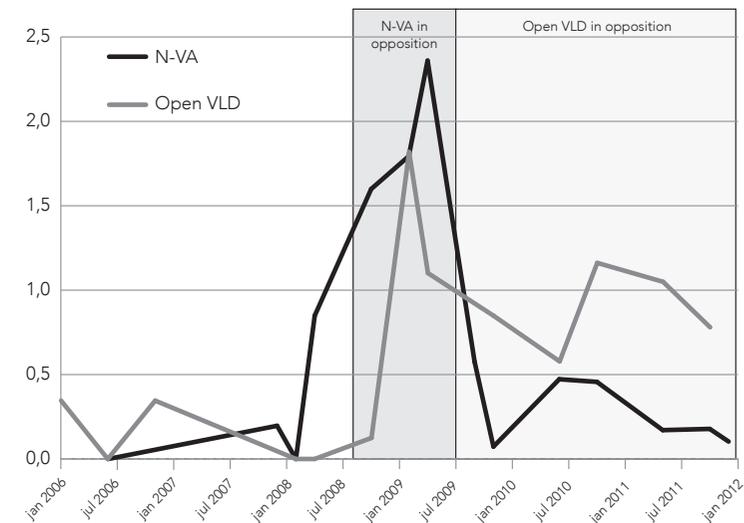
Rhetorical strategies

Three of the parties achieved a more or less equal (insignificant) hyperbole frequency score: the Flemish nationalistic N-VA (HB-ratio = .54), the liberal democratic Open VLD (HB-ratio = .56) and the environmentalist *Groen* (HB-ratio = .57). Although there are certain similarities, we also find clear differences in hyperbole use between these parties and we can identify their own specific characteristics. Whereas the environmentalist party *Groen* is a classic left-ecological opposition party, the Flemish nationalist party N-VA and the liberal democratic party Open VLD, both on the right side of the political spectrum, are the only parties that have both been part of the government and of the opposition in the selected time period. Differentiation of the hyperbole *ratio* whilst part of the government versus opposition shows that there are significant differences between the two different political roles at both the liberal democratic Open VLD (HB-ratio_{VLD_government} = .30 vs. HB-ratio_{VLD_opposition} = .91; $p < .05$) and particularly the Flemish nationalist N-VA (HB-ratio_{NVA_gov} = .27 vs. HB-ratio_{NVA_opp} = 1.92; $p < .001$).

Especially the Flemish nationalist party N-VA shows an interesting development throughout the years between 2006 and 2011. The N-VA is known for its somewhat radical and deviant style in Belgium politics (Pauwels, 2010; Maly and Zienkowski, 2011), nonetheless in the Flemish parliament they have been part of the government for many years in succession. There is only a small period in time, between September 2008 and July 2009, after they had withdraw from the government at that time, in which the Flemish nationalistic N-VA was part of the opposition. As we mentioned, remarkably huge differences are found between the politicians' roles in either opposition or government (see also Figure 4.2). A salient example is the N-VA politician Geert Bourgeois, who as a Minister *prior* to the oppositional period, uses almost no hyperbole at all, whereas

during the oppositional period the hyperbole ratio reaches high levels, by using a spate of 'classic' exaggeration, especially in terms of absoluteness, universalities and non-exceptions, e.g. 'but we all knew that', 'this leaves all questions unanswered', 'As everyone expected (...)', 'Not one French-speaking party ever took the dialogue seriously', 'but I think we all know better' (Bourgeois, N-VA, in Flemish Parliament at date 08/10/08 and at date 18/02/09).

Figure 4.2: Evolution of hyperbole frequency over time (Flemish nationalistic N-VA and liberal democratic Open VLD) in Flemish parliamentary debates from 2006 to 2011



Each of these three mentioned parties (Flemish nationalistic N-VA, liberal democratic Open VLD and environmentalist *Groen*) uses rhetorical exaggerations in a characteristic way. Whereas the Open VLD tends to use a lot of figurative hyperbolic expressions, e.g. example [8], only the N-VA uses hyperbole more in an ironic and sometimes in a more or less humorous way (see [9]), while *Groen* above all expresses its anger and disappointment (see [10]).

[8] '(...) yet {a} another blow [of the sledgehammer]. (...) That negative enumeration is [like] {b} bashing in an open door (...), with that {c} catastrophic financial crisis as a result. Now the real economy is being {d} dragged along in great intensity. (...). The costs of the health care {e}

explode' (Bril, liberal democratic *Open VLD*, 18/02/09)

[9] '(...) this {a} exciting dossier (...) which I will read with lots of pleasure. (...) I've described that as {b} 'indecisive decision-making'. (...) It is the chronicle of the proclaimed postponement. (...) You've succeeded in that in a {c} masterly way' (Peumans, Flemish nationalistic *N-VA*, 01/04/09)

[10] 'I'm [completely] dazed' (Meulemans, Groen, 05/10/11)

Populist exaggeration

Flanders (Belgium) is known for the (formerly) success of its right-extreme Flemish nationalist party *Vlaams Belang* ('Flemish Interest'), but in that wake it also witnessed the short upsurge of a classic right-wing populist party: *Libertair, Direct, Democratisch* (formerly known as *Lijst Dedecker*, or in short: LDD). Interestingly, LDD expresses its 'populism' (in its understanding of 'from and to the people') not only in the political ideology, but also reveals a strong 'populist' hyperbolic rhetoric. Their hyperbole use is aimed at the generalization of the mass ('the people'), such as 'we all know that' (e.g. Verstrepen, 23/04/08) or 'that's obvious to everybody' (e.g. Bouckaert, 04/05/11), more than any other party, and opposed to the political elites, expressed in an ironic and especially cynical way:

[11] '(...) you just don't know, it changes every five minutes' [about an opponent's political standpoint] (Verstrepen, populist *LDD*, 08/10/08),

[12] 'Again nothing was accomplished. We are seven years later and the result is still zero.' (Werbrouck, populist *LDD*, 18/11/09)

The extreme right party *Vlaams Belang* (VB) generally stands out in hyperbolic rhetoric compared to the other parties. Not only does it clearly achieve (on average) the highest frequency of hyperbole use (average of 1.16 hyperboles per 100 words), it also is the most negative (together with the environmentalist *Groen* party). VB-politicians tend to use many metaphorical expressions, as other parties do regularly, but their metaphorical overstatements are often expressed in very heavy words. This results in higher contrast and surprise, with reference to extremely inconvenient or negative circumstances. Moreover, the use of exaggeration is often expressed in an accumulation of multiple

(consecutive) hyperboles, as for example illustrated in quote [13]. VB is the only party where we can find politicians who use hyperbolic rhetoric in order to insult or attack other politicians, although in this analysis it is limited to attacking the opponents' policy (as examples [13] and [14] show) rather than the politicians' personal life.

[13] '(...) it is the {a} death agony of the {b} terminal ill patient Belgium' (Dewinter, right extreme *VB*, 10/09/07)

[14] '(...) it is slowly strangling' [about the government's policy] (e.g. Wymeersch, right extreme *VB*, 03/05/06)

Additionally, it is remarkable that VB is very repetitive in their rhetoric and with this, as the only party, relies on numerical and quantitative expressions, such as 'a new umpteenth time', 'years and years', 'years passing by', 'over and over again', 'endless', 'for once', 'months and years go by' (e.g. Dewinter, VB, in Flemish Parliament, on dates 16/02/11; 22/09/08; 21/12/11).

Discussion

In this study we tried to establish the recognition of the rhetorical figure of hyperbole in political language in addition to the existing (and lack of) academic literature and whether we could create a methodological instrument to detect and analyse hyperbolic language in current political rhetoric. Hyperbolic language has been detected in different forms and frequencies among different political parties. This study shows that the average politician uses almost two utterances of hyperbole per 300 words in his or her talk during the political debate, at least for the Flemish political case. It is also revealed that hyperbole suits a negative rhetorical style in politics, considering the higher share of negative use of hyperbole over positive use. Moreover, the results indicate a positive correlation between the frequency and the value of use, which means that the more hyperbole one uses, the more negative they become. It could provide us with evidence that hyperboles are rhetorical devices that are suitable more for negativism, criticism and cynicism than for positivism, (innocent) humour and laudation.

Hyperbole is used to create a contrast or a surprising effect, but also to express irony and (especially) negative feelings. However, insulting or (personally) attacking other

politicians through the use of hyperbole hardly occurs in this political case. Although there are certain exceptions among particular right-wing parties, this precaution certainly applies to parties who have regulated responsibilities in policy-making politics, which are often the centred and (long) established parties, normally affiliated to the government, such as the Christian democratic CD&V, the social democratic Sp.a and partially the Flemish nationalistic N-VA. The use of rhetoric in political language is particularly depending on context factors. It is, for instance, quite possible that hyperbole is used differently in other types or forms of communication, such as in interviews and speeches, where there is less need for cooperation and more room for rhetorical attacks (although the opposite could also be the case).

It was suggested in the previous chapter of this dissertation that ideological differences can be detected through rhetorical use of language. The results in this study lead us to draw preliminary conclusions that, for instance, certain (centre) parties tend to use fewer hyperbolic expression and when they do, in a mitigated or euphemistic form, whereas especially oppositional parties show significant higher degrees of hyperbole use, more negatively posed, which often expresses disappointment, indignation, irony or even cynicism^{vi}, although this needs further validation. A common hypothesis that higher degrees of hyperbole use ventilate the rhetoric of extreme or populist parties appears to be increasingly plausible. The 'radical' parties at the right of the political spectrum (the populist LDD and the extreme right VB) achieve the highest levels of hyperbole use, and express a more 'populist' form of exaggeration, by regularly referring to the general or common sense of the mass (e.g. 'we all know that...') and a strong oppositional standpoint against the political elite (e.g. 'again nothing was accomplished'), more than other parties in the political spectrum. Especially the extreme right party *Vlaams Belang* shows, as was also the case in the previous chapter, a very deviant and peculiar hyperbole use compared to the other political parties in the Flemish case. What could be most characteristic is the fact that they, as sole party, use clearly overstated numerical and quantity expressions. As a way to stress their opinion and claim emphasis to a subject, it appears to be an effective way of provoking and appealing to apparent negative deeds and decisions by the political authorities. This exceeds rather upon the lenient exaggeration, mostly situated in the field of *purity*, as commonly employed by most (other) political parties. The specific use of hyperbole by populist and extreme right parties is therefore a recommended track for further research.

NOTES

i We may use the terms hyperboles, exaggeration and overstatements simultaneously and interchangeably, although according to Gibbs (1994) a distinction between hyperbole (as rhetorical exaggeration) and simple overstatement can be made, as he defines the overstatement as unconscious or unintentional, while a hyperbole is (always) intentional. However, McCarthy and Carter (2004) argue that differentiation between intentional and unintentional use is of great difficulty, often impossible, and mostly unnecessary.

ii Positive hyperbolic subfields refer to evaluations of praise and approval, such as ideas of life and heaven (e.g. reviving, vital, paradise), ideas of perfection and magnificence (e.g. ideal, excellent, great, wonderful), or ideas of splendor and beauty (e.g. lovely, gorgeous, precious, brilliant) (Cano Mora, 2009, p. 29).

iii Cano Mora distinguishes eight different semantic subfields in the domain of negative hyperbolic evaluation, i.e. the idea of chaos and disorder (e.g. mess (up), illegible), the idea of shrillness and pungency (e.g. scream, squeal), the idea of badness and evil (e.g. worst, wicked, relentless, obnoxious), the idea of frightfulness (e.g. horrible, terrible, awful), the idea of violence and destruction (e.g. disaster, disgrace, devastated, ruin, erupted, blasting away, thrown on the scrap heap), the idea of sorrow or pain (e.g. pathetic, sickening, starving, freezing, not breathing, drained, headache), the idea of deadliness and hell (e.g. killing, dead, limbo, hell), or the idea of physical or psychic abandonment and loss of control (e.g. desperately, frantically, something on one's nerves or in one's head, crazily, went haywire, mental health problems, in fits, crack one up, (living on) drugs, asleep, no resistance) (2009, pp. 29-30).

iv A singular text sample consists of a consecutive contribution of a member of parliament during a political debate in the Flemish Parliament.

v Belgium consists, besides a general Belgian Federal government (and parliament), of several Communities and/or Regions (such as the Flemish, the Walloon and the Brussels-Capital), which have their own regional governments (and parliaments). These governments are assumed to contain most (regional) political power.

vi (Political) *cynicism* refers to the distrust or disbelief in the sincere or good, in a political context, consisting of a deep-rooted conviction of the inherent evilness of politicians, political institutions, and/or the political system as a whole (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Schyns et al., 2004) The emerge of political cynicism implies a causal relationship to an increase of political alienation, for instance a growing distance between politics and citizens (in the people's perception), but is also seen as a strategy that is used by politicians in order to distance themselves from the (rest of the) political order (e.g. De Vreese and Smetko, 2002; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006). The political system is an easy target to express against one's individual or a society's general dissatisfactions about everything. It provides one a license to blame politics instead of taking own responsibility (see Elchardus, 1994).

CHAPTER 5: POLITICS, IT HAS NEVER BEEN SO SIMPLE

"The world is extraordinarily complex, incoherent, and
changing. People are limited, however, in their mental
capacities to process information and fully satisfy
standards of ideal rationality in their attempt
to maximize their interests"

Jack S. Levy
'Political Psychology' (2013, p. 308)

This chapter is based on the following publication:

Kalkhoven, L. and De Landtsheer, C. (2017). 'Politics, it has never been so simple. Complex versus simple rhetoric and the use of *hyperbole* in political decision-making in the Netherlands.' In Bursens, P., De Landtsheer, C., Braeckmans, L. & Segaeert, B. (eds.), *Complex Political Decision-Making* (pp. 183-202). Routledge, London & New York.

Abstract

Since we found rhetorical differences on individual party-level in both Chapter 3 (on crisis rhetoric) and Chapter 4 (on hyperbole), it would be interesting to link certain aspects of rhetorical language to each other. Theory states that politicians tend to express their decisions, standpoints and behaviour in plain, simple, straightforward rhetoric. But the decision-making process might, in particular circumstances, require or take benefit from higher levels of complexity. It is assumed that several rhetorical figures, such as metaphor and hyperbole, affect the level of complexity, and with that the comprehensibility, of language or rhetoric. The use of these rhetorical figures could be aimed at the simplification of a statement or argument. Whereas the use of rhetoric for simplification is regarded as a semantic psychological effort, the cognitive complexity that is put into arguing or reasoning, as measured by the integrative complexity theory, should be perceived as an effort that is put in the cognitive psychological structure of language.

This chapter aims to establish a connection between the use of hyperbole (exaggeration as a rhetorical figure) and integrative complexity in the rhetoric of party leaders in the Parliament of the Netherlands. The question is whether we can link the cognitive structure of language to the rhetorical use of language. For the assessment of the (cognitive) degree of complexity/simplicity in language we use the method of integrative complexity (e.g. Suedfeld, 2010) that examines the levels of differentiation and integration in written or spoken texts, whereas hyperbole use is measured through the methods that we explained in the previous chapter. Results of this study show that simple political language, or rhetoric with lower levels of complexity, tends to contain a greater number of hyperboles compared to more complex language. Additionally, it meets the expectations that complexity in rhetoric by ruling elites is more elevated compared to rhetoric among parties without legislative obligations; lower complexity levels can especially be linked to the rhetoric of the radical-right populist leader.

POLITICS, IT HAS NEVER BEEN SO SIMPLE

Introduction

Politics is subject to a significant paradox. Politics and political decision-making are often seen as inevitably complex and incomprehensible, but there is a social and cognitive psychological tendency to simplify this process. Politics presents a difficult rhetorical dilemma: the (complex) decision-making process in a multi-party system requires collaboration and consensus-seeking, but politicians tend instead to engage in complex patterns of constant arguing, defending standpoints, and counter-attacking views (Ilie, 2003, p. 73). Politicians are utterly aware of how they express themselves publicly, especially in mediatized societies. Politicians commonly use a variety of rhetorical strategies (e.g. Condor, Tileagă and Billig, 2013). One strategy is to actively simplify or complicate the structure of their rhetoric in debates or other forms of political rhetoric.

Individual psychological variables, such as personality traits and leadership qualities, are seen as important factors in the decision-making processes, but the way that political leaders (and followers) behave depends on several circumstances. Suedfeld (2010, 2016) shows that, aside from reflecting stable individual differences among leaders, the complexity of decision-making and information-processing may also reflect 'variable states' that consist of both external (threats, danger and time pressure) and internal factors (stress or emotional arousal). Scholars investigated these 'psychological biases' (e.g. bounded rationality, selective attention, etc.) and the resulting oversimplification of judgments by elites facing threats and risks (see e.g. Jervis, 1976; Levy, 2013). "Political leaders trying to assess a threat need to make a very complex world somewhat simpler. To do so, they unconsciously strip the nuance, the context, the subtleties out of problems they face in order to build simple frames" (Stein, 2013, p. 371). Emotions, especially negative ones (fear, anger, insecurity, and anxiety) are commonly linked to the complexity of decision-making and leadership. Emotion may affect the way leaders make and communicate their decisions (Levy, 2013) and how decisions are received by their followers.

People confronted with (too much) complexity tend to react in a primitive or irrational way (Quinly and Glock, 1983). They have a preference for simplicity, are averse to ambiguity and dissonance, and fundamentally misunderstand the essence of probability (Dawes, 1998; Tetlock, 2005). “[T]he world is extraordinarily complex, incoherent, and changing. People are limited, however, in their mental capacities to process information and fully satisfy standards of ideal rationality in their attempt to maximize their interests” (Levy, 2013, p. 308). A common reaction to the cognitive struggle that occurs with two-sided (contradictory) argumentation is to simplify thinking and make use of categorization, heuristics (cognitive shortcuts) and generalities (Condor et al., 2013). Strategies that are used to make politics and political decisions better understandable include falling back on universal rhetorical concepts such as equality or freedom. Ideological labels facilitate the differentiation between parties (e.g. Althusser, 1971; Canovan, 2002), and difficult political issues are often depicted as questions of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’, as black or white, with nothing in between (Quinly and Glock, 1983). Political circumstances sometimes require more complex – reasoned, nuanced and/or severe – language. But, in order to address and attract potential voters, politicians eagerly simplify the inevitable complexity of politics and political decision-making.

Rhetorical strategies of simplification and complication

Political rhetoric is a primary part of political communication and the political decision-making process, but as we argued in Chapter 1, it is difficult to formulate a general and universal scientific definition. Rhetoric is often considered in a pejorative way, as being insincere, misleading or empty. But rhetoric can also be described – more positively – as the practical art of effective communication or the ability of using eloquence in speech acts (Condor et al., 2013, pp. 263-264). The classical Aristotelian and most common understanding sees rhetoric as (the discovery of) the available means to empower argumentation in order to persuade the public or (political) opposition in the debate (e.g. in Billig, 2003). In the twentieth century the academic perspective on rhetoric – that was always seen as inevitably political – altered to the linguistic aspects: the way of using signs and symbols as characteristics of language and persuasion.

Nowadays, political rhetoric is above all seen as persuasive or argumentative language by politicians (Bull, 2003). Social and linguistic psychology theories often characterise

rhetoric as a means to establish the comprehensive and positive in-group behaviour and beliefs, and to simultaneously ignore or restricts the out-group’s ideology (Turner, 1987; Van Dijk, 1993a; Bull, 2000). According to this polarized model of political argumentation, rhetoric often leads to zero-sum thinking and ideas of in- and exclusion (e.g. us-versus-them rhetoric). It relies upon rhetorical tropes or figures of speech (metaphor, euphemism, irony and hyperbole) that are well-known for their persuasive functions (Van Dijk 1993b; Van der Valk, 2003). Some rhetorical figures may affect the level of complexity – and with that also the comprehensibility – of language and discourse. The specific words that are used, the figure of speech or imagery, could have a psychological simplifying effect on the receiver. The reason for this simplification is that the human mind is used to and searches for shared ‘intersubjective’ meaning. By using metaphors, for example, the meaning of the world becomes clearer and more reassuring, as guidance through complex issues (De Landtsheer, 2009). But it appears to be difficult to establish direct rhetorical effects among respondents in empirical research. It is still uncertain when, how and to what extent these effects occur, and what distinction exists between simple and complex rhetorical figures as linguistic elements. It is nevertheless possible to connect rhetorical figures to the intrinsic level of complexity of the text or speech itself. This chapter aims to examine the relationship between the level of (cognitive) complexity in political language and the use of one of these rhetorical figures: hyperbole. One question elaborates on the variables that may affect the cognitive complexity differences between politicians. A second question focuses on the possible relationship between the complexity levels in the political debate and the use of rhetorical exaggeration.

Hyperbole as rhetorical device

The figure of speech *hyperbole* – or rhetorical exaggeration – is a significant trope in connection to the rhetorical complexity (or simplicity) of (political) language, but it hardly received attention in political and social academic literature. Hyperbole can be defined as an exaggerated form of phrasing in which words or a word group express an exceptional or even extreme representation of reality (e.g. McCarthy and Carter, 2004; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010; Ritter, 2010). Hyperbole is a stylish way to make people see ‘the truth’ with the use of a deceptive exaggeration imbued with *pathos*.

The rhetorical effect of hyperbole is that it appeals to the emotions of the audience (Ritter, 2010), and that it is used by speakers to empower their own emotions and to express their deceptions and irritations (Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010). One of the main characteristics of hyperbole is that, as an exceptional or extreme representation of reality, it can be perceived as a simplifying element in argumentation and persuasion. Hyperbole refers to the idea of 'all or nothing', 'zero-sum' situations in which exceptions are ruled out (e.g., 'it is always/never so' or 'everybody/nobody needs to...'), or the idea of apparent 'absolute truths' (e.g., 'there is no question about it' or 'we all know that') (see also Chapter 4 in this dissertation). From a psycho-linguistic perspective speakers intentionally use hyperbolic language to make a point, emphasize a point, or just to clarify statements. By using hyperbole, politicians express affective meanings (McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 153) and add a humorous effect, or irony (Robert and Kreuz, 1994; Colston and O'Brien, 2000a). But hyperbole is equally continuously used, even unaware and unintentionally, in our daily language (McCarthy and Carter, 2004).

Cognitive and integrative complexity theory

The link between (theories of) complexity (or simplicity) in language and rhetoric may seem decidedly clear, but cognitive complexity theories barely refer to the use of rhetorical devices, neglect them on purpose, or mark these devices as 'unscorable' (Condor et al., 2013, p. 267). Within the study of persuasion and argumentation, the cognitive psychological approach locates arguing and thinking (and the level of complexity) among the functions of reasoning subjects. But most rhetorical figures derive their 'power' especially through *pathos* (the emotional side of persuasion). The study of rhetoric often focuses on the exact words one uses and their psychological effects. Complexity theories concentrate on the cognitive psychology of language, in which the structural complexity of argumentation, persuasion and political activities, such as decision-making processes, play important roles. These theories do not show particular interest in either the complexity of actual language (e.g. word choice, grammar, semantics or semiotics) or in its psycho-linguistic or rhetorical effects. But from a psycho-linguistic perspective, language affects processes of thinking and behaviour, both by way of ratio and emotion (*logos* and *pathos*) and of their mutual influence. The study of political rhetoric is largely based on the same principles: the psychological

aspects of language and communication that stimulate cognitive and affective processes (persuasion, cognitive rationalization and arguing, or the arousing of emotions).

For example, the pressure of making right and accurate decisions is directly related to the increase of psychological stress, which influences "the information processing complexity of the individuals involved" (Holsti, 1972, in Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977, p. 170). Different studies confirm that crises affect the level of complexity in communication and in the decision-making process (e.g. De Sola Pool, 1956; Suedfeld and Rank, 1976; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Wallace et al., 1993). The way in which decisions are communicated heavily depends upon the circumstances and on the level of psychological stress. In crisis situations, simplifying rhetoric fulfils particular emotional needs of the public, such as reassurance and easy-to-process information. Non-complex or simplified rhetoric makes political decisions and discussion faster, easier to understand while also cultivating certain feelings of comfort in the audience. But political and military leaders who express higher levels of complexity tend to be more successful in maintaining their function, which indicates that particular circumstances may require a more complex rhetoric (e.g. Suedfeld, Corteen and McCormick, 1986; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Wallace and Suedfeld, 1988).

The study of (varying degrees of) cognitive complexity and/or simplicity in verbal and written communication has a long history in academic research. The method of integrative complexity as developed by Suedfeld and colleagues is probably the most in-depth and widely-used scoring system for measuring cognitive complexity (Guttieri et al., 1995, p. 598; Conway et al., 2008). Integrative complexity (or I.C.) is a psychological construct that describes the elaboration and complexity of any given information and thought (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977; Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988; Thoemmes and Conway, 2007). Current complexity theories depart from the idea that an individual's cognitive ability of information processing (whether or not deliberately) defines the degree of integrative complexity. The degree of complexity is derived from a one-dimensional scale of two gradual indicators: (the levels of) differentiation and integration. Differentiation refers to the ability to differentiate, i.e. the dimensions of stimuli that are recognized and taken into account in decision-making or debate. Differentiation is based on the source's recognition (and possible acceptance) of alternative perspectives and a number of different dimensions. In general, people who are capable of processing

more complex information differentiate a larger number of characteristics in any given multidimensional stimulus situation. Consequently, the more such dimensions are recognized, the more complex will be the individual's reaction to the stimulus. Integration refers to the ability to make complex conceptual connections among the differentiated characteristics, i.e. the combination of the different perspectives and dimensions in synthesized solutions (also known as *synthesis*). More complexity in communication means that more multiple, complex and flexible connections (instead of isolated, hierarchical interactions) between the dimensions are recognized (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977). The combination of the two factors differentiation and integration indicates whether a spoken or written text can be perceived as either complex or non-complex, or somewhere in between.

As we already mentioned in Chapter 2, the simplicity-complexity dimension can be considered on a (7-point) scale on which simple language and complex language mark both endings (see Figure 2.2). Simple language can be defined as

“anchoring around a few salient reference points; the perception of only one side of an argument or problem; the ignoring of subtle differences or similarities among other points of view; the perceiving of other participants, courses of action, and possible outcomes as being either totally good or totally bad; and a search for rapid and absolute solutions in order to achieve minimization of uncertainty and ambiguity.

At the complex end, we find flexible and open information processing; the use of many dimensions in an integrated, combinatorial fashion; continued search for novelty and for further information; and the ability to consider multiple points of view simultaneously, to integrate them, and then to respond flexibly to them” (Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977, p. 172).

The theories and model of integrative complexity are based on language used in crisis-induced decision-making processes. Yet (political) crises can be defined very broadly: there are multiple circumstances that can be considered or treated as ‘crisis-like’, such as political elections, in which the level of psychological stress increases (whether or not artificially), as we have seen in Chapter 3. It is confirmed that particular circumstances and the level of (perceived) stress contribute to varying levels of complexity in the political language. A study by Thoemmes and Conway (2007) based on speeches of almost every former US president examines ‘successful leadership’ as a result of variables that affect the levels of complexity in political language. The results show that

both environmental and personality factors contribute to variation in complexity. Most importantly, the level of complexity changes across the tenure of presidents. In general, the integrative complexity level is very low in the run up to the elections, but highest just after elections and lowest immediately prior to the end of the first term, when re-elections are ahead. This is reasonable not only because of the importance of being re-elected, but also because of a ‘cognitive overload’, i.e. the build-up of cognitive stress, which makes maintaining a high level of integrative complexity impossible (Thoemmes and Conway, 2007)ⁱⁱ. Moreover, the study in Chapter 3 of this dissertation also found a varying level of complexity between different political parties in their average political communication. We concluded that the level of complexity in language seems to be connected to the position of the political party on the ideological spectrum, i.e. the more to the right of the political spectrum, the lower the level of complexity appears to be (see Table 3.5).

Hypotheses

In this chapter we elaborate on the degrees of integrative complexity and the involvement of rhetorical figures, of which we use *hyperbole* as an example, in the real-world political case of the parliamentary debates in the Second Chamber in the Netherlands. The study focuses on particular political debates between the most important representatives (all party leaders in this parliament, and for the aim of comparison: the Prime Minister) that are involved in the decision-making process. It is generally argued that rhetoric, or the rhetorical figure as a strategic political device, is primarily used in order to simplify, clarify or illustrate complex or ambiguous information. Many politicians believe that clear and simple language benefits their political goals, i.e. as a means to appeal to the electorateⁱⁱⁱ. According to theory, simple, straightforward and non-complex language especially suits charismatic leaders, such as (most) populist and extremist politicians, who depend above all on their rhetoric (e.g. Abts, 2004; Kalkhoven, 2013b). However, sometimes the political role requires a higher standard of complexity. Moreover, being too simplistic could lead to oversimplification and/or to language of exclusion, risking that only a selective group will feel associated with the politician. Mainstream politicians rather seek the support of a broad range of people and their communication may therefore contain a higher level of complexity (Busby, 2009; Condor et al., 2013).

Hypothesis 1

Based on these previous findings, we expect that whereas levels of complexity are significantly higher among political leaders affiliated with governing parties, lower complexity levels can be found among politicians from parties without administrative responsibilities. The same applies to the use of the rhetorical figure of hyperbole (as was indicated in Chapter 4). Mainstream parties with politicians in office may be more successful in maintaining higher levels of complexity and less rhetorical language (e.g. Suedfeld, Cordeen and McCormick, 1986; Wallace and Suedfeld, 1988; Thoemmas and Conway, 2007), whereas political elites from opposition parties theoretically benefit from situations in which psychological stress increases, i.e. circumstances that are ‘crisis-like’ and ‘ask for’ higher levels of emotional rhetoric (for example situations in which anger, fear and threat are aroused) (e.g. Wallace et al., 1993; Tetlock, 2005; Stein, 2013; Levy, 2013). We also hypothesize that the level of complexity as well as the level of hyperbole use either increases or decreases once politicians shift in political role or function, i.e. respectively from government parties to opposition and vice versa. Finally, lowest levels of complexity, as well as the most hyperbolic language, can be attributed to parties from populist and extremist signature.

Hypothesis 2

Furthermore, it is expected that the rhetorical figure of hyperbole (as a rhetorical construct) correlates with integrative complexity (as a cognitive construct), in the sense that we hypothesize that communication with low levels of complexity contains a higher number of hyperboles than communication with high levels of complexity (which implies a negative correlation). Previous study already showed a negative correlation between the use of metaphors and integrative complexity, in which metaphors tend to decrease the level of complexity in a text or speech (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004; De Landtsheer, 2007). As argued in the methodology chapter, many hyperboles are metaphorically in nature, and metaphors are regularly exaggerations as well. Metaphors are considered ‘complex tropes’, which means that it costs cognitive energy to decipher the underlying message in a text. Whereas ‘simple tropes’, such as hyperbole, are much more straightforward in objective and recognition, complex tropes generate more profound persuasive effects in the long term (Toncar and Munch, 2003). Low complexity levels (level 1) are, at least partially, defined by the lack or even rejection of given options

(or perspectives), interpretation is one-dimensional, and ideas are generalized (Baker-Brown et al., 1992, pp. 13-19). This seems to align with characteristics of hyperbole that indicate categorical, all-or-nothing thinking, expressed in words of exaggeration such as ‘absolutely’, ‘all’, ‘always’, ‘certainly’, and so on. As hyperbole is believed to cause zero-sum judgment and black-and-white thinking, we expect a high negative correlation between (low) levels of complexity and the average use of hyperbole.

Methodology

Measuring integrative complexity

In Chapter 2 it was already explained in detail how integrative complexity scores are ought to be measured. We recapitulate the methodology and procedure here. The scoring of complexity, on a 7-point ordinal scale, is based on each new idea or thought in (a section of) the studied materials (see Baker-Brown et al., 1992). Because of the fact that integration requires a certain level of differentiation (*cf.* Hoffman and Slater, 2007) the scoring of ‘level of complexity’ is defined in terms of the increasing degree of differentiation and integration (in this order) in the cognitive processing of relevant arguments, positions, and viewpoints (Suedfeld and Bluck, 1988). Generally, the odd I.C. scores ‘1’ (no differentiation, no integration), ‘3’ (differentiation, but no integration), ‘5’ (differentiation and trade-off integration) and ‘7’ (differentiation and superordinate schematic integration) are benchmark scores, whereas the even scores ‘2’, ‘4’ and ‘6’ are ‘transition values’, indicating an inclination towards a higher value though insufficient to actually reach that higher score (Suedfeld, 2010, pp. 1672-1673).

The average of all selected scoring units is used to calculate the overall integrative complexity score of a source, which we can compare to the mean complexity scores of other sources^{iv}. The scoring of the text samples is executed by two trained coders. Both coders followed an in-depth training, in order to become expert coders themselves. The training, provided by the founders of the method, consisted of a series of pre-tests and an examination that tests for inter-raters’ agreement with the expert coders ($\kappa > .85$). The detailed coding *manual* for integrative complexity by Baker-Brown et al. (1992) provides the guidelines of the standard coding procedure. With the coding manual as a

basis, a coding scheme (with instructions) has been developed (see Appendix C: Table C.6). After successful accomplishment of the training, a series of practices and pre-tests have been executed between both coders in order to measure the inter-raters' agreement on the real case data, which yielded a high score, but did not exceed the requested level of agreement ($\kappa < .85$). In order to increase the reliability and thus rectify this problem to the best ability, mean coding scores of both coders involved per text sample are measured. All outliers, i.e. scores that differed above 1 point on the scale in between coders, have been removed from the sample. The calculation of the averages of the different coders is assumed to provide an accurate and reliable reproduction of the level of complexity in a text sample.

Measuring hyperbole

Subsequently, an analysis of hyperbole in the same database has been made^v. Hyperbole has been measured based on the criteria (as a checklist) by McCarty and Carter (2004), and adjusted for large corpus one-sided communication (without availability of receiver's response) (see Chapter 2 and 4), stating that a sentence (or word or group of words) is hyperbolic when it is and extremity or enlargement of reality, odd with the general context, counterfactual (but not meant as a lie), unlikely (considering the context/reality) and/or impossible, but still meant as a 'normal' utterance^{vi}, and whether extreme case formulations, and other syntactical clues, or utterances of figurative (metaphorical) exaggeration are expressed. The syntactical clues and extreme case formulations are the most obvious indicators of exaggeration (*cf.* Cano Mora, 2009, or Table 2.1 for an overview), and are usually expressions of general universalities, absoluteness, unquestionable veracities and other unreal/implausible overstatements. Most common expressions are 'always' and 'never', 'everybody' and 'nobody', 'absolutely (not)' and 'crucial(ly)', and cognate expression, but there is a wide range of different occurrence of hyperbole possible (see for more information Chapter 4).

Data selection

For this analysis we used data from debates in the House of Representatives in the Netherlands^{vii}. The study focuses on the most important representatives of the different

political parties involved, which are the party leaders of both governing and (the major) opposition parties. In order to ensure similar circumstances for all subjects of analysis, we performed a series of analyses of different years of the (yearly recurring) General Budget Debates^{viii}. The complete reports of the General Budget Debates are openly accessible and extracted from the official website of the government^{ix}.

Several consecutive paragraphs^x were selected from the individual contributions (without or with minimum interruption from other politicians) from the General Debates in the years 2010 until 2014 from the political leaders of the (at that time) seven major political parties in the Dutch parliament. We also included contribution to the parliament from the Prime-Minister Mark Rutte, in order to mark differences between a member of the parliament versus a politician in (highest) office, who has a different kind of responsibilities and obligations with respect to the decision-making process. The PM's results are only considered for the sake of comparison to other politicians, but are not taken into account as scores in the government-opposition variable. The contributions to the debates are (mostly) prepared (and written down) by the politicians^{xi}. Every first paragraph of a contribution has been excluded from the sample, because these are often distorted in comparison to the rest of the text (for example in the form of a citation or as a remark to the Chairman or the former speaker). As an extra control unit for unilateralism (non-representativeness) of the form of these particular debates, an additional debate from 2013 (March 03) was selected, which showed no significant deviation to the other debates (and in fact displays a particularly average result). Altogether an analysis has been executed of $n = 200$ relatively randomly (considering the preliminary conditions) selected usable units (paragraphs) for coding. In order to start the coding procedure all randomly selected scoring units of the total sample are being *anonymised*. This means that information that can identify the source – such as the text's source, date and author – and therefore potentially can influence the coder's opinion or expectations, is being withheld and/or replaced by generic words (e.g. Thoemmes and Conway, 2007, p. 202). In our case, the in-text *anonymising* applied for party names (i.e. <PARTY>), names of politicians (<POLITICIAN>) and date or year indications (<DATE>).

Results

Table 5.1 gives an overview of the integrative complexity scores of political leaders during debates in the Dutch Parliament. Whereas the mean score in this study is I.C. = 2.20, the individual average integrative complexity levels vary from I.C. = 1.15 (Geert Wilders, PVV, populist/extreme right) to I.C. = 4.12 (Prime-Minister Mark Rutte, VVD, liberal democrats). Hence, the rather low average I.C. scores in the debates by the Dutch Second Chamber party leaders are very comparable to the mean scores in previous (and recent) integrative complexity studies (*cf.* Suedfeld et al., 1998; Thoemmes and Conway, 2007; Hoffman and Slater, 2007; and also in Chapter 3). It would be too firm to state that ideological differences are expressed through varying levels of complexity, but there are undeniably various significant differences between party leaders – as the voice of their party ideology – noticeable. Especially the low I.C. level of the populist Party for Freedom's (PVV) leader Geert Wilders (he barely shows any signs of differentiation nor integration in his language), is significantly different from almost all other politicians, as is to the contrary the relatively high I.C. level of the Prime-Minister (Mark Rutte) during the debates. This directly indicates that, as we hypothesized, there is a significant difference in the level of complexity between politicians from government parties and politicians in opposition. As Table 5.1 shows us, the difference between both positions is remarkably big.

In our study we find a moderate correlation between the number of words that are used and the level of complexity (thus, the longer paragraphs are, the more complex they tend to be). We cancelled this out for the numbers of hyperboles (HB) that are used in the political language by making a calculation of the 'density' of hyperbole in a text, which is the average number of hyperboles per hundred words (this is called: hyperbole ratio). We also find significant differences in hyperbole use between politicians and party position (resp. $HB\text{-ratio}_{\text{Government}} = 1.05$ vs. $HB\text{-ratio}_{\text{Opposition}} = 2.74$, $p < .001$). When we look at the hyperbole ratio (thus: the average number of hyperboles found in each 100 words) per politician we see very similar although reversed significant results. Prime-Minister Mark Rutte uses the least number of hyperboles in his political debate, whereas Geert Wilders (although close to other opposition leaders) achieves the highest score on hyperbole ratio with $HB\text{-ratio} = 3.75$ hyperboles per 100 words, which is significantly above average ($p < .001$).

Table 5.1: Mean Integrative Complexity scores party leaders in Dutch parliament

Politician	N	I.C. score (mean)***	Hyperbole (ratio)***
VAN HAERSMA BUMA (CDA – Christian democrats)	27	2.22	1.84
PECHTOLD (D66 – social liberals)	28	1.93	3.01
VAN OJIK (Groenlinks – environmentalists)	18	1.72	2.72
SAMSOM (PvdA – social democrats)	18	3.00	.98
WILDERS (PVV – populists/extreme right)	27	1.15	3.75
ROEMER (SP – socialists)	28	1.96	1.88
RUTTE (PM, VVD – liberal democrats)	17	4.12	.62
HALSEMA (Groenlinks – environmentalists)	5	1.80	1.93
SAP (Groenlinks – environmentalists)	5	1.60	3.60
COHEN (PvdA – social democrats)	10	2.00	2.74
BLOK (VVD – liberal democrats)	5	1.80	2.04
HALBE ZIJLSTRA (VVD – liberal democrats)	12	3.17	1.37
<i>Total</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>2.20</i>	<i>2.23</i>

Position (affiliated to...)	N ^b	I.C. mean ***	Hyperbole (ratio) ***
Governing party	61	3.18	1.05
Opposition party	129	1.80	2.74

^a Hyperbole ratio = number of hyperbole per 100 words (average over all scoring items)

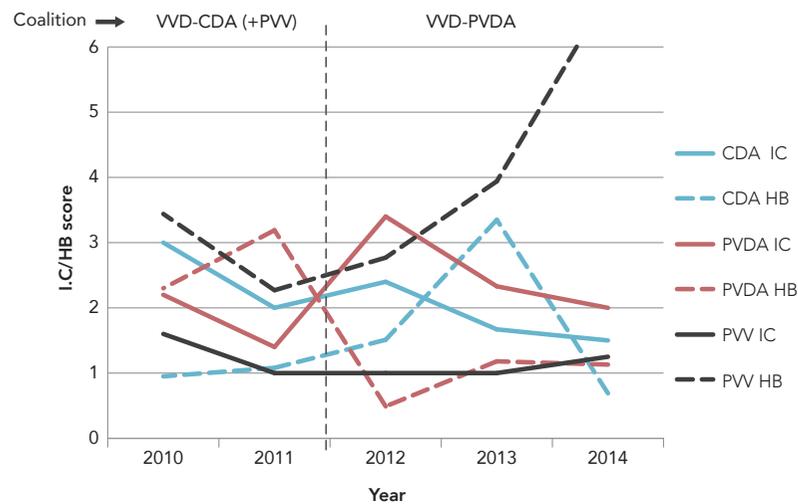
^b Note: The results of PM Mark Rutte (VVD) and the PVV's (Geert Wilders) position as parliamentary supporter (I.C. = 1.30) has been excluded from this part (party position) in the table.

*** Significance level at $p < .001$

The average I.C. scores have been tested for length of the scoring units (number of words per paragraph), gender (male versus female politician) and date of the debate (possible differentiation over the years), but for all these variables we found no significant differences. However, an analysis of the levels of complexity over the years did give certain relevant information regarding the different roles that party members have during the years. An analysis of the politicians of the parties that made a shift in their position from either governing to opposition party or vice versa (respectively CDA – Christian democrats – and PvdA – social democrats) reveals that both parties' leaders

show (to a certain extent) a reversed pattern regarding the mean levels of complexity (see Figure 5.1). The populist Party for Freedom (PVV) had a special role in Parliament for a short while (from October 2010 to April 2012) as the official Parliamentary Supporter of the minority cabinet of VVD and CDA. It is virtually only in the beginning of this period of time that there is any sign of complexity levels above I.C. = 1.

Figure 5.1: Evolution of mean I.C. (scale 1-7) and HB-ratio (number of hyperboles per 100 words) scores of the party leaders of CDA, PvdA and PVV over the years 2010-2014



Note: The vertical (striped) line marks the 2012 general elections and (therefore) the shift between different coalitions.

The second hypothesis stated that both the use of hyperbole and the complexity of political language are correlated, which means that the cognitive structure of language could be less complex (or more simplistic) in case that the rhetoric figure of exaggeration is being used. The aim to link integrative complexity to the frequency of hyperbole used in the political language indeed shows a moderate negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -.443, p < .001$). This indicates that in low levels of complexity speech, we find as expected a higher use of hyperbolic language. Further analysis reveals that almost half (47%) of the total number of hyperboles that are detected in the corpus are

located in text elements that received an I.C. score of 1; the lowest complexity score. This adds to even more than three-quarters of all hyperboles (77%) when we include the second lowest I.C. level as well, which leaves only 23% in higher levels (3-7) of integrative complexity. The mean hyperbole ratio in the lowest complexity level (I.C. = 1: HB-ratio = 3.66, $p < .001$) is also significantly higher than the average hyperbole use (HB-ratio = 2.23). All these results together demonstrate that there is undeniably a relationship between the psychological construct of cognitive complexity and the use of the rhetorical figure of hyperbole in political communication.

Conclusion

Considering its complexity, politics likely often benefits from – indeed, requires – simplification, the act of cutting to the core of the issue at hand. The theoretical insights elucidated that the simplification (or complication) of language could be considered beneficial depending on certain circumstances, the position one is in, and several other factors. This study confirmed the hypothesis that levels of complexity significantly differ between different political party leaders (with the populist party's leader standing out the most) and within the affiliation to a party role (governing and opposition parties). We also acknowledged that rhetoric plays an important role in the process of simplification, which we aimed to connect to each other.

We can state that there is a correlation between the use of hyperbole and the integrative complexity of a text. This implies that the use of certain rhetorical variables (as hyperbole ascertains) and the level of complexity somehow affect each other; the more these rhetorical figures are used, the less complex the language appears to be. This may not seem to be a big surprise as it is often argued before (but above all theoretically) that different types of rhetorical figures – and hyperbole in specific – make (political) language more simple and plain, and easier to understand and comprehend. But it is interesting that we can link the cognitive psychological structure of language to the semantic psychological rhetorical use of language and to its effects. The revealing proof that the two are related to one another is finally established.

This study found very similar patterns measured according to the levels of cognitive complexity and the use of hyperbole. Moreover, within the complicated world of decision-making and leadership, political elites behave, above all, in a way that is more or less expected of them. Politicians in opposition benefit from damaging the stability of the established order. Therefore, they will try to change the status quo by aiming for instability, insecurity and crisis. They will eagerly increase the psychological stress by conceiving threats and risks, by zero-sum judgments, and by highly emotive 'black-and-white'-rhetoric. On the other hand, political leaders who are affiliated to governing parties benefit from moderate rhetoric, because they obtain relief in stable circumstances in which they can steadily execute their policy.

NOTES

- i One of the most obvious figures of speech in this context is probably the rhetorical use of *oversimplification*, in which a fallacy of a single (or questionable) cause (or false dilemma) occurs ('it is either A or B').
- ii Noticeably, having a particular standard of complexity is in itself not beneficial for a president, as it does not have a direct influence on perceived successful leadership. However, presidents who dropped quickly in complexity after their first speech tended to lose, while presidents who dropped in complexity closer to their re-election campaign tended to win. This implies that successful candidates are aware that a lower complexity level at a certain point increases their likelihood of winning and therefore deliberately make their rhetoric simpler. After elections the new elected presidents seem to realize that they must change their approach: simple rhetoric will not allow one to deal with the complexity of actual governing (Thoemmes and Conway, 2007).
- iii Trying to speak a non-complex language that 'everybody can understand' supports the (popular) wish among politicians to be seen as 'one of the (ordinary) people' (Busby, 2009).
- iv Whereas content analysis normally relies on 'content-counting rules' (e.g. fixed cues of words), integrative complexity scoring rather relies on the judgment of the coders "who may have to make subtle inferences about the intended meaning of speakers" (Baker-Brown et al., 1992, p. 3). This demands for three basic preliminary coding ground rules. First, rating agreement between coders needs to be measured, prior to the overall coding, following the standard rules of *inter-rater reliability* (or *agreement*) ($\kappa \geq .85$) (Suedfeld, 2010). Second, disagreement in scores between different coders cannot exceed 1 point in a scoring unit, otherwise the particular scores (outliers) will be coded as 'missing values'. And third, the coders should be well trained and keep in mind several important aspects during the coding process. The key element of these aspects is that the analysis of level of complexity does not contain "an assessment of appropriateness, practicality, effectiveness, or morality" (Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977, p. 173). This means that "[t]he coder should not assume that it is always 'better' to be more complex" (Baker-Brown et al., 1992, p. 3). The advantages of the method are that it allows for a systematic, standard procedure of measuring levels of complexity in an objective and useful way, it is universal and comparable, and the real-life product causes high ecological validity (Suedfeld, 2010).
- v The analysis of hyperbole is made by the same coders (both authors). Again a series of pre-tests and an inter-coder's reliability test ($\kappa > .50$) increased the likelihood of reliable outcomes.
- vi A normal utterance in this sense should be seen as an expression or statement that makes sense in a way, as in opposition to nonsense (purely rubbish), absurdism (ridiculousness) or purposely lying
- vii The House of Representatives (or 'Second Chamber') is one of two chambers (besides the 'First Chamber', or Senate) in the Dutch bicameral parliamentary system. The House of Representatives harbors the cabinet (ministers and state secretaries) and all elected political parties. Within the Second Chamber, political representation is given, legislation is proposed and discussed, and the members of cabinet are reviewed. All these functions make the House of Representatives the most important in the political decision-making process.
- viii In Dutch: *Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen*. The General Political Debates follow after the Day of the Queen's (or presently: King's) speech (*troonrede*) about the yearly national budget. During the Debates, which serve as the most important yearly possibility to discuss the state of the country, every party leader has a chance to defend or criticize the past acts and future plans of the incumbent (or newly elected) government. On the second day, the Prime Minister comments on the Budget and responds to the questions and remarks that have been made.
- ix At www.overheid.nl/zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl
- x See further Chapter 2 for the scoring procedure.
- xi See the discussion section in this chapter and in Chapter 9 for more elaboration on this matter.

CHAPTER 6: POPULIST IDEOLOGICAL STANCES IN WESTERN EUROPE

"The rise of populism in Western Europe is, in large part, a reaction to the failure of traditional parties to respond adequately in the eyes of the electorate to a series of phenomena such as economic and cultural globalization, the speed and direction of European integration, immigration, the decline of ideologies and class politics, exposure of elite corruption, etc."

Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell
'Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy' (2008, p. 1)

This chapter is based on the following publication:

Kalkhoven, L. (2013a). Populist Ideological Stances in Western Europe: Contemporary Populism in the Low Countries in the Light of the European Context. *Politics, Culture and Socialization*, 4(2), 230-250.

Abstract

One of the conclusions that all chapters so far share is that we find the most deviating rhetorical characteristics amongst the radical-right parties or their political leaders. It can be interesting to link (strategic) rhetoric to the particular language of this radical politics, which is often labelled as populism. However, before we can analyse the rhetoric of populism, it would be wise to explain this ambiguous concept first. In this in-depth study we explore the concepts of populism and ideology more extensively, and elaborate on the presence of populism in the political contexts of Flanders and the Netherlands, as two specific cases in the Western European emergence of (often) similar populist parties.

This chapter has two major objectives. First it attempts to clarify the ambiguity and vagueness that surrounds the understanding of populism to a certain extent. A theoretical study argues that, although populism seems to thrive on strategy and rhetoric, there is also a moralistic populist ideal to descry. However, populist ideology is ambiguous in presence, (therefore) sometimes difficult to detect and often evaporated in a mix of populist beliefs, discourse and strategy. Secondly, the study aims at locating populism in today's political spectrum of Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands, compared to other populist parties in Western Europe.

POPULIST IDEOLOGICAL STANCES IN WESTERN EUROPE

Introduction

Curiously, it appears to be very popular to use the word 'populist' or 'populism' for all sorts of *popular*ⁱ (political) acts and behaviour currently, as if the political world is faced with a completely new reality. Although the overall rise of populist success in many (Western) European societies is a relatively new theme, populism is definitely not a new phenomenon and it is often argued that the rise of populist movements comes in different waves throughout modern history. In this historical view, populism as we know it can be divided into three major waves, wherein it originated from so-called classic populism in the late 19th century (the People's Party in the U.S. and the *narodniki* in Russiaⁱⁱ), moved to a political form of left socialist-oriented, totalitarian populism (e.g. *peronism* in Latin-America), to the right-wing populism, or *New Populism*, as it is predominantly represented today (Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 1995, 2000). Whereas for a long time cases of populist movements popped up in all parts of the world except for (Western) Europe, according to the pioneering groundwork of Ionescu and Gellner (1970), the main focus on populism in the latest decades has almost exclusively been situated in Western Europe.

"The rise of populism in Western Europe is, in large part, a reaction to the failure of traditional parties to respond adequately in the eyes of the electorate to a series of phenomena such as economic and cultural globalization, the speed and direction of European integration, immigration, the decline of ideologies and class politics, exposure of elite corruption, etc. It is also the product of a much-cited, but rarely defined, 'political malaise', manifested in steadily falling turnouts across Western Europe, declining party memberships, and ever-greater numbers of citizens in surveys citing a lack of interest and distrust in politics and politicians." (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 1)

In present day's understanding of populism, people tend to consider populist parties as radical right, extreme right or neo-fascist (e.g. Taggart, 1995), although populist

ideas originate mostly from left oriented movements. Radical left populism is still very alive in several Latin-American countries (e.g. De la Torre, 1997; Weyland, 2001). The North American and European focus lies almost exclusively on right populism. “In ideological terms, the New Populism is *on the right, against the system, and yet defines itself as in the ‘mainstream’*. It is right-wing, anti-system and populist, it is of the people but not of the system.” (Taggart, 1995, p. 36, *italic* as in original citation). With the political success (as well as failure) of new populist parties across European countries since the early nineties, such as in France, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and different Scandinavian countries, scholars of all kinds began to describe the topic of the so-called populist *Zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004) that has been present in Western Europe up to this day. In all different countries specific case studies of these populist emergences have been performed regularly, however, a comparison between often very similar political contexts has been done in much lesser degree. The aim of this chapter is to explore the existence of populist ideology in contemporary Western Europe, in which the main focus lies on locating the presence of populism in two specific comparable political contexts, namely in the political realms of Flanders (Belgium) and in the Netherlands.

The populist ideal

Political worldviews, such as socialism, liberalism, and to a certain degree also populism, are essentially based on classification and structure of the (political) world, which we call political ideologies. Ideologies provide defined vices and virtues, they contain common norms and values, so one can separate right from wrong, but it is also guidance throughout the political complexity. It provides conceptual maps of the political world, it divides different political stances into one clear picture that voters can grasp and on which they base their political preferencesⁱⁱⁱ. The use of different ideologies serves political effectiveness, as it is bridging gaps between politics and the people, based on fixed “core concepts whose significance and range meanings are beyond question” (Canovan, 2002, p. 30).

It could be argued that populism is one of these political ideologies, however, a major inquiry of discussion regarding the defining of populism is the question whether a (singular) populist ideology actually exists. Although it may be challenging to define ‘populism’, there is agreement on some recurring principles that persist in almost every

definition of the populist ideal. The basic concepts of populist ideology are (the will of) ‘the people’, the central role of democracy and the sovereign state, and the importance of (resisting) the counterpart of the people: ‘the elite’ (see e.g. Taggart, 2000). Within the principle of the sovereign democratic state, populists argue that the purest form of democracy, one in which the people (the state’s citizens) have true political power, is the ideal society. Representatives of the people should always pursue the ‘people’s will’: politics is about (and only about) fulfilling the needs and desires of the people. Derived from a utilitarian perspective, ‘the people’ in this matter usually refers to the aggregated mass majority (Canovan, 2002, 2004).

The ideas of ‘the people’ as the only legitimate democratic power and ‘the will of the people’ as true sovereignty give ground for defining *the* populist ideology. Mudde (2004) describes this as: “[A]n ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (p. 543). The singular and homogeneous idea of ‘the people’ is formed by a cultural (national) identity, with its own will and voice, the *vox populi* (Abts, 2004). In order to know (or to justify to) the will of the people, the direct democracy, which relies as by definition on the *majority* principle, is needed. Populists respond strongly and gratefully to important social issues (e.g. homeland security, immigration, etc. – see e.g. De Landtsheer, Kalkhoven and Broen, 2011), that in their opinion have been neglected or not taken seriously by the established powers for too long. Moreover, in the populist vision, the ‘voice of the people’ is been abducted by the incumbent political and cultural elite: power-hungry and corrupt politicians who have lost all connection with the ‘common man’. In this view, the established politicians do not care about ‘the people’ but only serve their own interests^{iv}. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008) emphasize in their definition the existential threat that derives from ‘the corrupt elite’ and other entities that are opposed to ‘the pure people’:

“We define populism as an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice.” (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 3)

The populist vision is based on a distrust of the representative political elites, since they

mainly serve their own benefits, such as personal gains and conservation of power. In the populist view the all-corrupt politics is a 'necessary evil' that has been abused too much and too often. Inasmuch the nation needs some structure – in order to avoid anarchy – populists support democracy. The general representative democratic idea is that politics represents the people, and that political decisions are being made under *supervision* of the people. The populist democratic principle embraces a more idealistic understanding of democratic sovereignty (a direct democracy), wherein 'the people' themselves make political decisions, thus in which the state is (or should be) *self-regulating*. Populists will plead for popular sovereignty: an independent state in which 'the people' embodies the nation, or even further, in which 'the people' *is* the nation. The populist party, hence in essence anti-political, offers resistance and 'fights from within' against the corrupting elite, so that politics will be given back to the people once again (Canovan, 2004). The voice of the people, in its turn, is embodied by a populist leader, necessarily sacrificing his or her own private life and career for the public's general good, who is the representative of the *common sense*, regarded as a critical 'popular' will that is opposing the system (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). According to the populist, it is necessary that the incumbent elite makes room for these new leaders, who then are willing to stand up for the 'people's interest' (Deiwiks, 2009).

The populist ideology, as we can argue, does exist on its own amidst other (major) political ideologies. But instead of a complete political embodiment of programmatic content it is rather in the notion of a moralistic ideal. To summarize, this moralistic ideal can be perceived as (I) an idealized image of the people's democracy, (II) the proposition that 'the people' is abandoned or even betrayed by the political establishment, and (III) that this basic principle must be restored or regained (Abts, 2004).

Criticism on populism

The conception of the populist ideology is, however, liable to a lot of criticism. Within the characterization of the populist ideology, the biggest obstacle is the vague definition of the concept of 'the people'. Who or what are 'the people' and (how) is it possible to speak in the name of one presumed homogeneous population? The most straightforward, tangible understanding can be obtained from the idea that the people is a *part* of the population that is unified as a result of opposing its *counterpart(s)*; those who share a

(or more) common 'enemy/ies'. This distinction is mostly defined as 'we' (the people) against 'them' (the enemy), in which 'the enemy' is for example the (political/cultural/intellectual) elites, the (oligarchic/capitalistic/socialistic) state, or 'the' institutions (e.g. 'Washington' or 'the European Parliament'), but in many cases also an outsider (such as the foreigner, the immigrant, the intruder). 'The people', in this – rather desultory – populist understanding, is often unified by class, race, and other (cultural) identities (as are 'the others'), and generally have in common that they are depicted as the virtuously good versus the 'bad' and/or 'dangerous' other (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008).

Taggart (1995, 2000) tries to clarify the vague notion of 'the people' by introducing an alternative concept that refers to the *state of mind* in which these presumed unified people (would) exist. Taggart refers to this idea as 'the heartland': a kind of imaginary, harmonious state "in which, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides" (2000, p. 95). 'The people' is thus an idealized representation of the community to which one belongs, a nostalgic and mythical idea of a country where (part of) the population originates, and to where one longs back. 'The people', as in the definition of the populists, therefore forms an "imagined community" (Mudde, 2004, p. 546) rather than a real one. Additionally, politics is, in the populist vision, a threat to the harmony and stability of the inhabitants of the 'heartland'.

One of the consequences of the commonly shared values and enemies is that Western European populism is often compared to or even synonymously named as the extreme right. Although many populist parties share common values (e.g. anti-immigration) and possess similar organizational characteristics (e.g. hierarchical structure) with certain parties of the right-extreme signature, many scholars point out that it would be problematic and inaccurate to equate populism to right-extremism (e.g. Ignazi, 2003; Fennema, 2005; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008)^v.

A more general criticism on populism is that the populist ideology lacks fixed core ideas, especially in programmatic values. Whereas ideologies normally provide comprehensive and permanent "core concepts whose significance and range meanings are beyond question" (Canovan, 2002, p. 30), populist parties are "generally held to lack grand visions or ideological projects" (Betz, 1994, p. 107). It is argued that the populist ideology therefore should best be regarded as a *thin-centred* ideology (in Canovan,

2002): a non-full, 'thin' version of a political ideology, in which (unlike ideologies such as socialism or liberalism) a total, comprehensible and orderly worldview is absent (Freedon, 1998). To put this differently: populism has yet a moral but lacks a program. Populist party programs can contain varying themes and positions, depending on (the suspicion of) a changing public opinion and interest. Hence, 'the populist ideology' represents many different ideas. There are, for example, many different types of populist movements to distinguish, such as national-populism, left- and right-wing populism, conservative and liberal populism.

A third criticism is the paradoxical idea of democracy: democracy and populism are inseparable but at the same time contradictory. "All populist movements speak and behave as if democracy meant the power of the people and *only* the power of the people" (Mény and Surel, 2002, p. 9). Canovan speaks in this perspective about a 'democratic paradox' (Canovan, 2002, 2004), which means that democracy on the one hand brings the mass of the people into politics, but that it on the other hand requires institutional arrangements that are too complex for most people to grasp in imagination (think about electoral procedures, proportional representation, process of consultation and discussion, etc.). The paradox is the fact that we as the people do not see ourselves exercise power; neither can we see a collective of people doing so on our behalf.

Zijderveld (2009) argues that populism considers the voice of the people traditionally as the absolute truth. Populist leaders proclaim the 'absolute truth' because they speak 'for or on behalf of the people'. However, the lack of a clear core program consequently allows populist standpoints to be opportunistic, time-specific, changeable and volatile. The boundary between idealistic leadership and a *Machiavellian* principle that allows the leader to say 'whatever the people want to hear' for his/her own benefit, is therefore sometimes difficult to define. Most populist parties in Western Europe are in fact opposition parties without any legislative responsibility, whereas expressing general criticism on the incumbent administration from the sideline is more opportune than when political policy is actually supposed to be executed.

Arguably, the 'lack of programmatic values'-arguments indicates why populism relies on more than only its moralistic ideology. Without a related communication style of a charismatic leader, there is not much left of the populist phenomenon in a society

(De Landtsheer, Kalkhoven and Broen, 2011, p. 8). Hence, Canovan (1999) describes populism not as much as a political ideology, but as a political style or mobilization strategy, which appeals to 'ordinary people', and places the democratic power of the people against existing structures of power and dominant (political) ideas and values in society. *Populist mobilization* is a style of political rhetoric, which appeals to the people as the only legitimate power (Kazin, 1995, p. 3). Populist movements revolt against the established structure of power in name of the people. Within democratic systems that often means an attack on the established [political] parties (Canovan, 1999, p. 3). Dominant ideas and values in society are being rejected as by definition in that sense. The populist mobilization is (thus) an effective strategy in order to achieve political influence and power, using a specific rhetoric, which appeals to existing feelings of dissatisfaction or resentment within the people against a cultural, institutional and/or political establishment, and which is claimed to be on behalf of these ostensible (cultural) homogeneous people (Canovan, 1999; Abts, 2004). In every understanding, populism inevitably relies on a *populist style or rhetoric*, characterized by strong and charismatic leadership, which emphasizes the popular distrust in current establishment and which aims at the 'ordinary' people (Abts, 2004, p. 454). The populist rhetoric can be described as the language of the 'man in the street' and simplistic, 'short and sweet', in plain terms and harsh, but because of that also as offensive, sarcastic and exaggerated (Abts, 2004).

Populism in Flanders and the Netherlands

As we have argued, the populist ideology may be a *thin-centred* concept and it will be a diffuse and ambiguous work to pinpoint populist parties in the political realms. Nevertheless, it is an interesting exercise to explore the populist presence in actual political contexts and place them at the ideological differentiation of the political landscapes. In this part the focus lies on populism in the current political situation of two geographical contexts: Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands.

Flanders (Belgium)

In the 'Low Countries' there is in fact one clear example of a traditional right-extremist

national party, with populist characteristics: the *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest). The Flemish *Vlaams Belang* (VB) has been particularly successful at finding consumers for its politics. It has experienced a series of successful elections since it was founded in 1978. The VB is, according to Mudde (2000) and Swyngedouw (1998), one of the most successful extreme right parties in Western Europe and depicted by Davies and Lynch as “one of the most significant far-right movements in Western Europe” (2002, p. 355)^{vi}. The VB presents itself as radically different from the traditional parties, as the one and only defenders of the Flemish people, the voice of the silent majority, a resistance movement (Swyngedouw and Ivaldi, 2001; Jagers, 2006; De Cleen, 2009). The populist stances are not only ideologically based, but also expressed in language and discourse. According to Jagers and Walgrave (2007), VB’s significant proportion and intensity of references to the paradigms ‘the people’ and ‘anti-establishment’, as well as references to in- and exclusion, provides evidence of populist language and rhetoric, and therefore a classic example of a communication strategy of a populist party. A study by Simon-Vandenberg (2008) examined the rhetoric of VB and concluded that their right-wing populist tactic is to turn (substantively speaking) weak argumentation into extreme powerful phraseology – slogans, loose quotations, etc. – which is merely irrelevant to the actual subject, but at the same time very effective in attracting potential voters. Other effective rhetoric that is characteristic to the extreme right discourse of VB, according to the author, is a high degree of polarization (the people against the establishment), personal attacks, and by depicting the opponent as irrational and being of bad faith.

An example of a neo-liberal populist party is *Libertair, Direct, Democratisch*^{vii}. LDD turned out to succeed in filling the gap at the right side of the political spectrum, i.e. between the liberal-right VLD and the extreme right VB (Pauwels, 2011). The LDD is in many ways a typical populist party: its party program aims at a ‘policy of common sense’, with special attention to a limited role of the government, the free market and the importance of the *vox populi* and more direct democracy. The political system is considered corrupt, sectarian and exclusive to others as a means to stay in power. Dedecker has openly referred to a conspiracy from the establishment against him and the LDD (Pauwels, 2011). Besides the electoral opportunity of the large ideological space between mainstream politics and the radical right, the (limited) success of the LDD is to a large extent the merit of its charismatic party leader Jean-Marie Dedecker

(Pauwels, 2010), who repetitively (proudly) classified the LDD as a populist party^{viii}.

Since the federal election of 2010 the success of both VB and LDD is (heavily) declining, which can largely be attributed to the emergence of another political party that captures part of the same market as the right-wing nationalistic parties: the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (‘New-Flemish Alliance’, N-VA). This party, which was founded in 2001 after the collapse of the Flemish nationalistic *Volksunie* (‘People’s Union’), is a completely different story. In 2003 N-VA already seemed to vanish as it barely reached the threshold of 5% in the federal elections. Subsequently it jointed a cartel with the Christian democrats (CD&V) in order to ‘survive’ the following (regional) elections. The cartel ended in 2008, due to lack of progression and differences of opinion on policy matters, but the N-VA achieved a surprisingly good result on its own in the 2009 regional elections. In the general federal elections a year later, the party expanded that success by gaining 17.4% of all the votes and it eventually became Flanders’s largest party. The question is, however, whether the N-VA can be classified as a populist party or as a mainstream party. There are only few traditional populist ideological marks to be found in the N-VA ideal (Pauwels, 2010). The party leader Bart De Wever is the charismatic central figure of the N-VA. The N-VA discourse is not classically anti-elitist because the party is surprisingly elitist itself sometimes (and definitely not the *vox populi*), but the discourse indeed proves a populist track (Maly and Zienkowski, 2011).

The Netherlands

The Netherlands experienced several small and temporary populist parties since the rise of (the late) Pim Fortuyn. Only one party in this group managed to succeed and still exists vividly: the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party of Freedom, or in short: PVV), led and embodied by the politician Geert Wilders. With his sense for pure populism, along with statements that tend to radicalism or right extremism, it appears to be rather difficult to classify Wilders’ politics (as I will argue in Chapter 7). There has been a considerable academic dichotomy whether one should regard Wilders as a populist (e.g. Zijderfeld, 2009; Vossen, 2009) or as someone from an extreme right stance (Van Donselaar and Rodrigues, 2008; Moors et al., 2009; Riemen, 2010). However, Wilders and his PVV oppose the extreme right signature and he defines his own ideology rather as pragmatic, above all democratic^{ix}, and if necessary as populist^x. In recent years, the ideology of PVV

seems to shift from a neo-liberal populist stance to a more classical national populist party, for example considering the conciliation of different right populist/extremist parties (such as VB, *Front National* and FPÖ) in the context of the European Union and its elections^{vi}. Notwithstanding, outside the PVV's ideology, the populist discourse and the rhetorical talent of Geert Wilders determine a substantial part of the PVV's politics and its success (e.g. Van Leeuwen, 2009; Kuitenbrouwer, 2010; De Landtsheer, Kalkhoven and Broen, 2011).

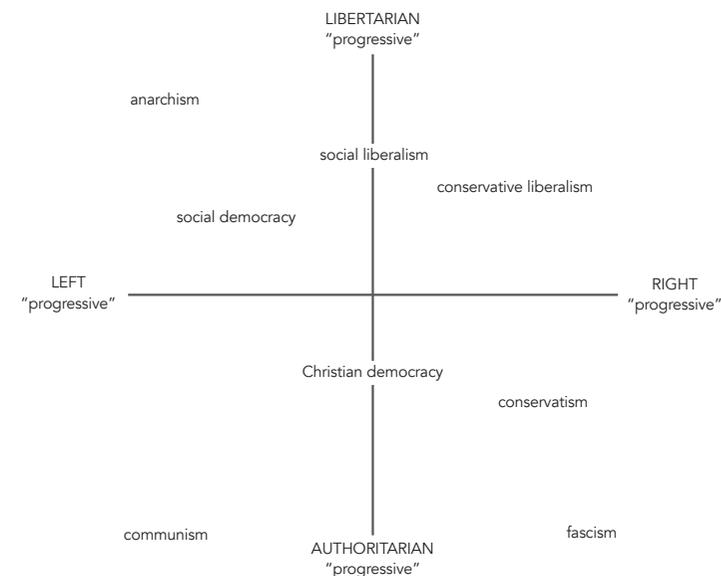
Ideological populist positioning

For the purpose of the following chapters in this dissertation, it is our aim to get a better understanding of populist political parties and their ideological stance in regard to other (so-called non-populist or mainstream) political parties in the cases of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). How can these supposed populist parties be classified in ideological perspective? To make an ideological differentiation between parties, it is currently common to use a two-dimensional scale that divides not only the classical (economic) left-right dimension, but also the difference between libertarian and authoritarian parties (usually referred to as the moral progressive-conservative division). A useful division of ideologies, placed in this quadrant system, is provided by Slomp (2000), in which, according to the author, European political parties can be placed (see Figure 6.1). The figure also displaces the main different ideologies that are recognized in this context. Noticeable, not surprisingly, populism as ideology is not part of this division, as we cannot place populism univocally into one of these quadrants.

In order to get an image of the ideological spread in the Dutch and Flemish context, we can place the political parties (of the recent political situation) into the two-dimensional ideological scale (of Figure 6.1). The famous and authoritative *Chapel Hill Expert Survey* series (1999-2010) provide a current, valid and reliable classification of political parties on both the domains of the classical left-right scale, as well as the progressive-conservative scale. Equally important, these political expert surveys make a proportionally objective comparison of (the different parties in) the two countries possible. Figure 6.2 gives an overview of contemporary Dutch and Flemish parties, placed into this ideological framework. The ideological position in this figure (see Figure 6.2) is based on a two-item

scale of ideology, namely the general left-right division, and the progressive-conservative scale, which is here indicated as the GAL-TAN division, in which GAL represents *green/alternative/libertarian* parties, and TAN represents *traditional/authoritarian/nationalistic* parties (Bakker et al., 2015).

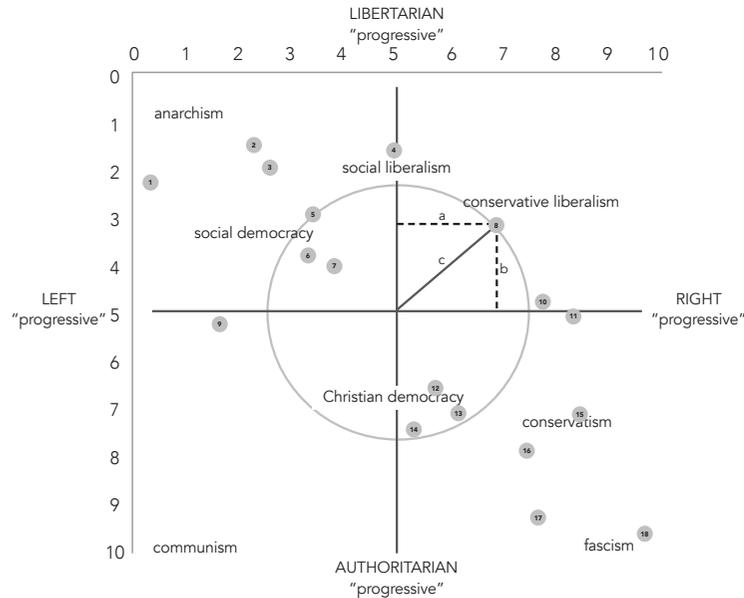
Figure 6.1: Two-dimensional division of ideology according to Slomp (2000)



Parties that are positioned close to the 'neutral' centre are often part of one of the traditional distinguished ideologies (social democracy, liberalism, Christian democracy), and in the Dutch and Flemish context they usually have a governmental, rational and stable character. Parties that are situated further from the centre point appear to have more radical ideologies, such as communism, anarchism or fascism at the endings. The more parties are diverged from the neutral centre, the more these parties are characterized by radical standpoints, irrationalism and controversy. It is expected that populist parties will be rather found at the endings of the ideological spectrum, and in the West-European case especially at the radical right, as we have argued earlier. Table 6.1 shows the hierarchical classification of the political parties in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium), ranked by their distance to the ideological neutral centre. The

distance to this point is schematically depicted in Figure 6.2, in which the distance to centre (c) is calculated by the two-item ideological position (a) and (b).

Figure 6.2: Two-dimensional ideological classification of Flemish and Dutch political parties (own deign)^{xii}



For both the Flemish and Dutch political context applies that the parties that have been marked as populist (LDD[11], N-VA[16] and VB[18] in Flanders; PVV[15] in the Netherlands), are placed in the same right wing, conservative quadrant. Their distance to the ideological neutral centre is all above average, however, LDD and N-VA are placed among other non-populist (though opposition) parties, PVV and especially VB are further removed from the ideological centre. VB is by far the most deviant party of all Dutch and Flemish political parties, marked as extremely right (economic conservative) and authoritarian (moral conservative), and even approaches the ideological utter corner of fascism. Whereas PVV and N-VA are somewhere in the middle of the quadrant, LDD is rather different (particularly right wing, but almost neutral in the GAL-TAN dimension). Other parties that are placed at a fairly far distance from the

ideological centre are (the very marginally) parties such as PVDA[1] (utter left wing party in Belgium) and the strictly Dutch Reformed (Calvinist) party SGP[17]. Also the green parties *Groen*[2] and GL[3] (in both contexts) have well-defined and distinguished ideological positions, almost the opposite of the established populist parties in the Low Countries.

Table 6.2: Hierarchical classification of Dutch (NL) and Flemish (B) parties, based on distance to ideological neutral centre

Ranking	Party (nr in Figure 6.2)	Country	Distance to centre ^a
1	PvdA (7)	NL	1,52
2	CD&V (12)	B	1,78
3	PvdD (6)	NL	2,03
4	CU (14)	NL	2,46
5	CDA (13)	NL	2,50
6	SP.A (5)	B	2,60
7	VLD (8)	B	2,64
8	VVD (10)	NL	2,87
9	SP (9)	NL	3,36
10	D66 (4)	NL	3,43
11	LDD (11)	B	3,43
12	NVA (16)	B	3,85
13	GL (3)	NL	3,92
14	PVV (15)	NL	4,21
15	Groen (2)	B	4,40
16	SGP (17)	NL	5,11
17	PVDA (1)	B	5,45
18	VB (18)	B	6,69

^a Distance to centre is measured in the same unit as the two-item scale in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. The exact value in its own is of minor importance, whereas the difference between values (parties) gives more information about the ideological positions. Numbers behind party name correspond to the numbers in Figure 6.2.

The West European Populist Party

How does this ideological positioning relate to other Western European populist parties? We make a similar evaluation of political ideology of political parties, in which we (only) include other parties in Western Europe that have been labelled as populist. Most of them are right-wing political parties, to which the differentiation between populist and extremist sometimes is vague and ambiguous. Nevertheless, to all of them certain populist traits are recently attributed. For this matter we rely on the different chapters of Albertazzi and McDonnell's collection *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (2008), in which several contributors to the topic of populism shine upon the populist phenomenon in their own Western European country's political contexts. Political parties that are (or are connected to) populist are *Front National* (FN) in France (Rydgren, 2008, pp. 166-180), FPÖ in Austria (Heinisch, 2008, pp. 67-83), *Legia Nord* (LN) and *Il Popolo della Libertá* (PDL, formerly known as *Forza Italia!*) in Italy (Tarchi, 2008, pp. 84-99), SVP/UDC in Switzerland (Albertazzi, 2008, pp. 100-118), *Independence Party* (UKIP) and BNP in the United Kingdom (Fella, 2008, pp. 181-197), the left populist party *Die Linkspartei/PDS* (PDS) in Germany (Decker, 2008, pp. 119-134), *Fianna Fail* (FF) in Ireland (McDonnell, 2008, pp. 198-216), and the Scandinavian populist parties Danish *People's Party* (DF), Norwegian *Party of Progress* (FrP) and the *Sweden Democrats* (SD) as all described by Rydgren (2008, pp. 135-150). Although it is not part of the previous, we also add the recently popular party *True Fins* (PS) in Finland to that.

Figure 6.3: Two-dimensional ideological classification of Western European Populist political parties (own design)^{xiii}

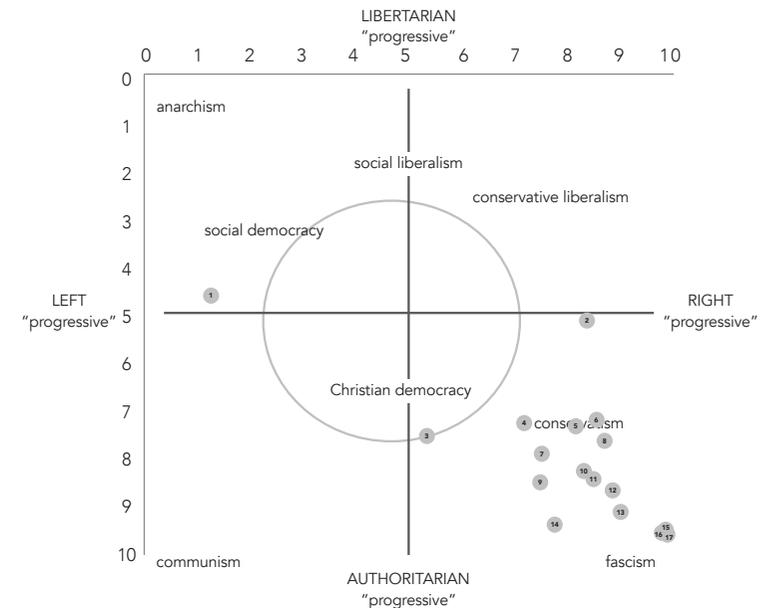


Figure 6.3 gives an overview of the populist ideological stances of Western European populist parties in relation to each other. It is noticeable that almost every single party that has been included is positioned within a very small ideological distance of each other. The only one great exception is the (single) left wing populist party that has been mentioned: the German PDS[1] party – although, as Decker (2008) explains, the party has had very limited success and plays a role in the margins of the German political scene at the moment. The cloud of dots at the bottom right side marks the typical contemporary Western European populist party, according to the political experts surveyed in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey studies: a right-wing party that generally can be characterized as highly economic and moral conservative, authoritarian in structure, nationalistic in nature, and supporting mostly traditional values. Interestingly, many of these parties are positioned in the utter right corner, ideologically close to the area of fascism. Most of these parties are often labelled as classical extreme right parties that contain certain populist characteristics. Although populism is theoretically often

attributed to a wide range of ideologies, Western European populism seems above all closely related to the extreme right.

Discussion

In this study we explored the concepts of populism and ideology more extensively, as well as the presence of populism in the political contexts of Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands, two specific cases in the emergence of populist parties. Additionally, this study examines the ideological stances of populism in the context of Western Europe. Ideologically speaking it comes not as a surprise that populism in Western Europe – including Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands – is located almost exclusively in the right wing, conservative and almost fascist-like quadrant. Many of the populist parties across Western Europe seem much alike, and importantly, not a new phenomenon in Western European history at all. Studying populism in the Western European context is therefore challenging, but to our beliefs also necessary. Whereas this research has been mostly a theoretical elaboration, it does provide us with some useful information and insights, but is above all starting ground for further examination of populism. Populist ideology is not only very difficult to detect, it is also often evaporated in a mix of populist beliefs, discourse and strategy. In our understanding of the populist ideology, we should consider the populist strategy as well – a rhetoric that seems arguably inextricably bound up with the populist ideology.

NOTES

- i Both 'popular' and 'populist' derive from its Latin origin *populus*, which means 'people', whereas that can either mean *by* the people and *for* the people.
- ii Although, according to Margaret Canovan, the two forms of populism "could hardly differ more from one another" (Canovan, 1981, p. 3), as the People's Party derived from an agrarian background, whereas the *narodnichestvo* found its origin among the Russian intellectuals.
- iii This may well be a very broad, holistic and perhaps outdated understanding of ideology, although it serves here rather as a moralistic principle as how ideology once was perceived. In present-day it is sometimes argued that political ideology is outmoded and has principally become fainter in our societies.
- iv Wansink (2004, p. 28) uses an aptly quote to express this feeling of (lost) sovereignty: "Politics is ours, the sovereign people deserves complete authority about policy. But we are excluded from power by corrupt politicians and a non-representative elite who betrays our interests, neglects our beliefs and treats us with contempt." (Original quotation translated from Dutch).
- v The differences between these 'radical right parties' is further explained in the next chapter (Chapter 7).
- vi On June 13th 2004, nearly 1,000,000 people voted for the VB at the June 2004 elections. In October 2004, *Le Soir* published a survey showing that 26.9% of voters intended to vote for the Vlaams Blok in forthcoming elections, which makes it the leading political party in the Northern Region of Belgium (in Moufahim, Humphreys, Mitussis and Fitchett, 2007). In recent years (2010-2014), however, support of the VB has significantly declined.
- vii Formerly known as *Lijst Dedecker*, LDD was founded in 2007 by former sports coach Jean-Marie Dedecker. Dedecker was expelled from the liberal party VLD because he openly criticized and harmed the VLD, as his range of ideas appeared to be too right-wing for the party.
- viii See for example: "Populist, dat is een eretitel!" [Populist, that is an honorary title!], *De Standaard*, January 20, 2009.
- ix Wilders sincerely disposed the extreme right classification by Moors et al. He stated: "I'm really furious. They have become crazy. What an idiocy. We are democrats at heart. We are democratically elected and we only use democratic means." Wilders calls the investigation "another shameful and morbid attempt by the elite to demonize us. (...) If there is anything that undermines democracy, then it is the leftist elite, among whom these kind of fake researchers, and Islamization." Source: *Elsevier*, October 31, 2009.
- x In Wilders' own words: "Populism has a negative connotation in the Netherlands. Listening to the voters is, in my opinion, rather a good thing, so in that sense populism is an *honorary* nickname [in Dutch: *geuzennaam*]" Source: *NRC Handelsblad*, March 12, 2011.
- xi See for instance: *Vrij Nederland*, November 11, 2013 (<http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Samenleving/Artikel-Samenleving/De-nieuwe-extreemrechtse-vrienden-van-Wilders-1.htm>)
- xii Figure 6.2 is a contraction of Slomp's (2000) model of European Politics (division), which differentiates ideologies into a two-dimensional spectrum of left-right and libertarian (progressive)-authoritarian (conservative), and the division of political parties in the Netherlands and Flanders, based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey studies (1999-2010). Mean scores on two variables ('general left-right' and 'GAL-TAN') are

measured and expressed in the ideological model by Slomp. Belgian parties – PVDA (1), Groen (2), Sp.a (5), Open VLD (8), LDD (11), CD&V (12), N-VA (16) and VB (18) – are scored by 16 experts, Dutch parties – Groenlinks (3), D’66 (4), PvdD (6), PvdA (7), SP (9), VVD (10), CDA (13), CU (14), PVV (15) and SGP (17) – by 14 experts.

The two items are questioned as follows:

“General Left–Right: ‘We now turn to a few questions on the ideological positions of political parties in [country] in 2010. Please tick the box that best describes each party’s overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).’

GAL–TAN: ‘Parties can be classified in terms of their views on democratic freedoms and rights. ‘Libertarian’ or ‘postmaterialist’ parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. ‘Traditional’ or ‘authoritarian’ parties often reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues.’ An 11-point scale ranges from 0 (libertarian/postmaterialist) to 5 (center) to 10 (traditional/authoritarian).’ Source: Bakker et al., (2015).

xiii Corresponding parties: (1) PDS (Ger); (2) LDD (B); (3) PS (Fin); (4) FF (Ire); (5) FrP (Nor); (6) PVV (NL); (7) N-VA (B); (8) UKIP (UK); (9) PDL (It); (10) SD (Swe); (11) LN (It); (12) FPÖ (Aus); (13) SVP/UDC (Swi); (14) DF (Den); (15) FN (Fra); (16) VB (B); (17) BNP (UK).

CHAPTER 7: THE IMAGERY OF GEERT WILDERS

“Populism has a negative connotation in the Netherlands.

Listening to the voter, I think, is rather something beautiful,

in that sense populism is a honorary nickname.”

Geert Wilders

(*NRC Handelsblad*, March 12 2011)

This chapter is based on the following article (submitted for publication):

De Landtsheer, C and Kalkhoven, L. (*forthcoming*). The Imagery of Geert Wilders, Leader of the Dutch Party For Freedom (PVV). A Political Metaphor Analysis.

An earlier version of this article was published in Dutch as:

De Landtsheer, C., Kalkhoven, L. and Broen, L. (2011). De beeldspraak van Geert Wilders, een tsunami over Nederland? *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*, 39(4), 6-21.

Abstract

The populist ideal might be thematically appealing for an increasing group of people in our societies, as the previous chapter argued, but there is undeniably a prominent role for the populist rhetoric in it as well. In this chapter we focus on rhetorical aspects of populism, which we link to ideological (thematic) stances, in a case study of a populist politician in the Netherlands.

More specifically, the study examines the language of the Dutch politician Geert Wilders and his Party for Freedom (PVV) against the yardstick of the ambiguous concepts of ‘populism’ and ‘extreme right’. The first theoretical part of the chapter addresses the difficulty of defining in terms of populism and right-extremism. Should we consider Wilders as a populist or rather a right-extremist? The second part is an empirical section that tracks the political style and thematic choices by Wilders. The empirical study uses a thematic quantitative content analysis and a metaphor analysis. The metaphorical language is, as in Chapter 3, measured according to the Metaphor Power Index method, a quantitative view of the metaphorical power of a text (De Landtsheer, 2015). Data consist of direct communication derived from the politician. Three different news formats are examined: columns and opinion pieces by Geert Wilders, and the official press releases of the PVV, in the time period October 2004 to June 2010. Results show that Wilders is especially paying attention to the ‘classic’ extreme right themes: nationalism, security, immigration policy and politics. The metaphor analysis demonstrates that his language style includes many strong metaphors that are assumed to provoke strong emotions, such as unrest, and metaphors that aim at convincing people of the need for (political) change.

THE IMAGERY OF GEERT WILDERS

Introduction

Since the general elections in 2006, the ‘Party for Freedom’ (PVV, *Partij Voor de Vrijheid*) of Geert Wilders became one of the key players in the political landscape in the Netherlands. Between October 2010 and April 2012 the PVV delivered parliamentary supportⁱ to the centre-right minority government of the conservative-liberal ‘People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy’ (VVD, *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*) and the Christian-democratic ‘Christian Democratic Appeal’ (CDA, *Christen-democratisch Appèl*). Although the coalition collapsed early and new elections caused a decline in popularity (from 15.4% in 2010 to just over 10% of the votes in 2012), the party remained the third largest of the country. During the following years the PVV’s popularity seemed to increase again, and in the build-up to the general elections in 2017 the political polls assign the PVV as (one of) the most popular of all partiesⁱⁱ. Wilders is best known for his clear political viewpoints, where he ‘says what he thinks’, and often with harsh and simplistic statements (Van Leeuwen, 2012). His uncompromising language against Islam, which he called a “fascist ideology” that should be “forbidden” (*De Volkskrant*, August 8, 2007), and the promise to his voters to aim for less Moroccans in the Netherlands (e.g. *Nu.nl*, March 19, 2014), resulted in two trials in which Wilders was accused of (incitation to) discrimination and hate speech against Islamⁱⁱⁱ.

Although Geert Wilders is in the centre of attention in media and academic research, it appears to be rather difficult to politically classify him. In the previous chapter (Chapter 6) it was shown that the PVV is, ideologically speaking, in the same area as most populist radical right parties in Western Europe. However, the academic debate still often centres around the question whether Wilders is of extreme right signature (e.g. Van Donselaar and Rodrigues, 2008; Moors et al. 2009; Riemen, 2010) or a populist (e.g. Zijderveld, 2009; Vossen, 2010, 2011). This is partly caused by the shifting position in which the PVV moves. Whereas Wilders used to resist every approach to (classic) European extreme right parties such as the French *Front National* and the Belgian

Vlaams Belang (Moors et al., 2009), in recent years these parties have openly reached out to each other for collaboration, for instance at the EU level^v. Wilders, however, still strongly opposes against the label ‘right-extremism’, a label that is often given to politicians and groupings who speak openly about reducing the number of ‘strangers’ in their country (e.g. Fennema, 2005). Wilders feels more comfortable with being a “populist”, a term that (in his own words) “has a negative connotation in the Netherlands. Listening to the voter, I think, is rather something beautiful. In that sense populism is a honorary nickname”^{vi}. According to Wilders (2005)^{vii} himself, the PVV ideology relies above all on pragmatism: “On several issues we have liberal standpoints, on many we are culturally-conservative, and in others we are more progressive”^{viii}. The current prime minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte (VVD) described Wilders, already during his political collaboration with Wilders, as someone “who needs his style” to be successful^{ix}. But it is precisely this style of Wilders that is now ‘on trial’. After a series of political collisions between Wilders and various other politicians^x, the prosecutions of Wilders for discrimination and hate speech, and the 2011 deadly political attacks in Norway by Anders Breivik (who declared that he had been inspired by Wilders), some believe that this rhetoric and discourse has become a breeding ground for political violence^{xi}.

A study of the rhetoric of Wilders is socially urgent, and it may provide information about the political position of the PVV. This chapter therefore examines the ‘metaphorical’ rhetorical style of Geert Wilders, based on his own words in columns, opinion pieces and press releases. It may equally contribute to a better understanding of the political labels attached to Wilders and the PVV, going from right-wing populist to authoritarian and extremist. It is first necessary to investigate the ideological differences between right-wing extremism and populism, in terms of ideology and style.

The New Radical Right: from right-extremism to populism

Since the late 1980s Europe has seen a growing popularity of parties on the far right (e.g. Mayer, 2013). These types of parties are usually being placed at the utter or so-called extreme right side of the political spectrum, and received a variety of labels such as ‘radical right’ (e.g. Taggart, 1995; Norris, 2005), ‘extreme right’ (Ignazi, 2003; Carter, 2005), ‘new right’ (e.g. Fennema, 2005), or ‘populist (radical) right’ (Betz, 1993; Mudde, 2007). Although these types of parties have been studied at large in the last decades, it

still appears to be a difficult subject for research (Bale, 2012). The literature has above all a difficulty to define this, rather familiar, subject in one universal way. “We seem to know who they are even though we do not exactly know what they are” (Mudde, 2000, p. 7). This is caused foremost by the little agreement on the “underlying ideology of this party family or the ideological positions of its supporters” (Eger and Valdez, 2014, p. 1).

Parties at the far right usually create their own ideological mixture derived from the collection of ideas and ideologically shared concepts, which makes it hard to compare these political expressions (Heywood, 1998). Radical right, extreme right and right populist parties do share several similarities, such as an aversion against the established political order, the intellectual elite (i.e. anti-establishment) and their preference for (anti-)immigration policy as the central theme of the party’s program. All these different political streams of extreme right, fascist, racist and populist parties are therefore often grouped under the ‘anti-immigration parties’ label, although these terms are not randomly interchangeable, as for instance populist parties are certainly not by definition right-extreme, racist or fascist (Fennema, 2005).

A diverse family of anti-immigration parties

Anti-immigration parties can be divided into three groups of the same but diverse family (see e.g. Van der Brug et al., 2014). A first group of classical right-wing parties is the traditional extreme right. Right-extremism has become an ‘umbrella term’ for ideologies such as fascism, neo-fascism, ideological racism, extreme nationalism, totalitarianism, and even Nazism. It is difficult, however, to compare these ideas to each other. Nevertheless, all these different forms of the extreme right do share similar elements of “racism, nationalism, euro-centrism, aversion to parliamentary democracy and anti-Semitism” (*Art.1*, 2004)^{xii}. Characteristics that are also mentioned are “supporting a powerful state”, “irrationalism”, “the importance of a strong leader” and “the justification of physical violence” (e.g. Mudde, 2000; Gaus, 2004). Van Donselaar and Rodrigues (2008) give a solid summarizing definition of right-extremism as “a positive orientation on ‘the own’, and an aversion to ‘the strange’, ‘the alien’ or ‘the foreign’, to political opponents and the established politics, combined with a need for authority”. (Neo-) Fascism seems to be the most general and recurring of the extreme right ideologies. Heywood describes fascism as “a political ideology whose core theme is the idea of an organically unified national community, embodied in a belief in ‘strength

through unity” (2000, p. 56). Although a known neo-fascist party is *Golden Dawn* in Greece (Van der Brug et al., 2014), this type of classic extreme right party is currently only limited present and not very successful within the political order in Europe.

Secondly, there is a group of parties that also have roots in totalitarianism or fascism, but have (sometimes necessarily) changed (their discourse) into the so-called new radical right and have become populist in nature (e.g. *Vlaams Belang* in Belgium, or *Front National* in France). There is still a strong link between the structure of contemporary radical right parties, which is based on the strong leadership principle (the “*Führerprinzip*”), and the tradition of the (in Western Europe mostly vanished) classic totalitarianism or neo-fascism (Fennema, 2005). According to Heywood (1998) and Ignazi (2003) one should classify these radical right parties as being similar to fascism and they call them “fascist-like” parties. The fascist-like right-extreme political axiom of social inequality is the starting point of a shared idea of national unity, but leads at the same time to differentiation between people in a society. Social hierarchy is derived from references to a natural (and therefore metaphysical) state of being, myths and the idea of ‘common sense’ (Fennema, 2005). Following the fascist emphasis on strong leadership, only authoritarian charismatic leaders are a guarantee for making the right decisions. Irrationality and even anti-rationalism are crucial in the fascist idea, because they address and emphasize the soul, emotions and intuition (Heywood, 1998).

A third group is more recently established and has no neo-fascist tradition (but far more often a (neo-) liberal offspring), although they share a very similar ideology with the second group (examples are *FPÖ* in Austria and *Lega Nord* in Italy). In the last decades various newly founded parties have become part of this family, and often with considerable success, such as the *Danish Progress Party* or the Dutch *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF). According to Van der Brug et al. (2014) these parties are not essentially extreme right “[g]iven that the ideology does not prominently feature anti-democracy, anti-Semitism, or classic racism” (Van der Brug et al., 2014, pp. 68-69). All of these parties have been given the label populist (or populist radical right), as one of the key elements that seem to unite these parties.

The populist radical right

Mudde (2007, 2013, 2014) defines the so-called populist radical right according to three

main shared (ideological) characteristics: nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Nativism is defined as a “xenophobic form of nationalism in which a mono-cultural nation-state is the ideal and all non-natives (i.e. aliens) are perceived as a threat to the nation” (Mudde, 2014, p. 2). This principle exceeds the idea of anti-immigration, in a sense that the aversion against ‘the other’ is (or has become) broader than that (e.g. aversions against specific minorities in society, the European Union, the political ‘left’, the social and intellectual elite, etc.). Authoritarianism, the belief in order and strong leadership, is a familiar recurring concept within all different types of the radical right. Populism is a much more difficult concept to grasp, as it has proven to be difficult to define populism and the populist ideology (see Chapter 6). Populism represents many different ideas and ideologies, such as national populism, left populism and right populism. Populists often shift between left and right ideas, between ‘socialist’, ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ positions (Taggart, 2000; Canovan, 2002; Navia and Walker, 2008). One of the major ‘problems is that there is disagreement whether populism should be seen as an individual political ideology, or as something entirely different. Literature describes populism either as an independent ideology (e.g. Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004), or as a communication style (or rhetoric) that is typical for leaders of extreme (or radical) right parties, and which is part of an electoral mobilization strategy (e.g. Kazin, 1995; Rooduijn et al., 2014), or as a combination of both (see e.g. Abts, 2004; Albertazzi, 2007; Bos et al., 2013).

In a broad and moral sense, it is possible to define the populist ideology, similar to (the ideals in) other ideologies. There is agreement about certain principles of the populist ideal that recur in (almost) every definition: the (importance of the) will of ‘the people’, the resistance of the people’s natural counterpart ‘the elite’, the central role of (sovereign) democracy and the preference for authoritarian and charismatic leadership (e.g. Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000; Abts, 2004; Zijderfeld, 2009). The leader of the populist movement holds a central position; this person who speaks and acts on behalf of the people represents the *vox populi* and is different from other politicians: “[t]he leader symbolizes the people; he expresses the ‘general will’ (...)” (Mosse, 1980).

As argued in Chapter 6, the populist ideology may have a clear moral ideal, but it lacks fixed values, universal (programmatic) ideas, and (consequently) a complete, comprehensive worldview (Freedon, 1998; Jagers, 2006; Kalkhoven, 2013b). It could

therefore be considered as a deficient version of an ideology: a *thin-centred* ideology (Canovan, 2002; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). Populist party programs can contain variable positions and themes, depending on the shifting public opinion and interests of the people. An extreme right standpoint on immigration policy can be combined with a strong defence of liberal rights and values (freedom and equality) and an almost socialist idea of social welfare (e.g. Mayer, 2013; Eger and Valdez, 2014). The populist style can in that way be combined with most (other) ideologies (such as socialism, liberalism or conservatism). Although we should not exaggerate the effect, populism seems to change the (West) European political landscape in a way (Mudde, 2007). In fact, it is argued that a populist style has become almost mainstream (Mudde, 2004), and in recent years, mainstream parties adapt a more populist rhetoric as well (Albertazzi, 2007; Bos et al., 2013).

Classifying the Party for Freedom

So where in this web of classifications of the radical right can we place Geert Wilders and his party? Even though the Party for Freedom (PVV) has no roots in the (neo-fascist) extreme right tradition, it has been described in similar terms (e.g. Van Donselaar and Rodrigues, 2008). Moors et al. (2009) modified the terms ‘right-extremism’ and ‘radical right’ into *new radical right*, as they called Wilders’ party “in ideological sense ‘national democratic’, but without the connection with old right radicalism” (Moors et al., 2009, p. 97). The party addresses classic extreme right themes, such as anti-immigration and nationalism. Besides, he would oppose ‘the elites’ as well as everything that is intellectual, cosmopolitan or in a way deviant to ‘the people’^{xiii}. Certain characteristics of the traditional extreme right, such as ‘the justification of physical violence’ (cf. Gaus, 2004), cannot be found in Wilders’ ideology^{xiv}. The label ‘racist’ is, although Wilders would always resist the accusation, more open for debate since the legal charges in recent years. Van der Brug et al. (2013) placed him in the third group of the anti-immigration party family stating that it would be incorrect to call the party extreme right, since certain aspects (e.g. anti-Semitism, anti-democracy) are not present. Nativism and authoritarianism are characteristics that are more easily attributed to the PVV. If we would define contemporary (or new) radical right ideology as a fascist-like ideology, that contains the key values irrationality, nationalism, strong leadership, and a hierarchical party structure, it might be possible to classify the ideology of Geert

Wilders and his PVV in this second category (Moors et al., 2009). By now it seems beyond doubt that the PVV contains all aspects of a populist party (Mudde, 2014, who calls this a ‘populist radical right party’). However, considering the combination of his radical right, almost fascist-like, worldview and party hierarchy, the underlying thin-centred populist ideal and the omnipresent imbued rhetorical style, could it be possible to consider Geert Wilders both as a right-extremist and a populist? We should therefore consider not only the ideological approach but also the language that is used and the themes that are addressed.

Themes and rhetoric

Themes in extreme right and populist ideology

The most important indicator of right-extremism in political language at the manifest level is the presence of right-extreme, or fascist-like themes (e.g. racism, xenophobia, nationalism, anti-politics) in the content of the political communication. Fascist-like political language contains negative content, it is fundamentally based on dissatisfaction, and it considers the political constellation as significantly problematic, and assumes that fundamental change is necessary (e.g. Wodak, 2002; Simon-Vandenberg, 2008). Fascist-like political leaders will attempt to create a general feeling of insecurity, anxiety and (social) unrest, as a means to change or even destroy the current political system (i.e. anti-politics). Populists are likely to address several themes, even though the subjects of anti-elitism and anti-establishment are characteristic (e.g. Mudde, 2004; Curran, 2004; Jagers, 2006). Populists, and a populist rhetorical style, are characterized by a lack of nuance, being “simplistic in their judgment” and “generally confusing clarity with rudeness” (Zijderfeld, 2009, p. 23). Populists use simple language, because ‘the people’ must be able to understand the politicians’ language and vocabulary (Abts, 2004). The ‘gap’ between citizens and politics has to be reduced by speaking out openly about ‘whatever has to be said’.

Metaphor as persuasive version of ideology

This chapter focuses not only on the themes, but also on the rhetorical style, in the form of use of metaphor, by the politician Geert Wilders. To capture an ideology entirely we need to pay attention to both *what* is said and *how* it is said. The presence of ideological characteristics at the level of content and style demonstrates that discourse and ideology are strongly connected and gives evidence of “ideological work” (Sutherland, 2005, p. 18). A politician ought to be capable of constructing his/her own ‘persuasive version of reality’. The strength of argumentation by the French authoritarian right-extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen, for example, is above all the result of his talent to combine and integrate different elements, such as his extreme right themes, rhetoric, images, and an accumulation of arguments, and to fit this into a specific context and audience (Bonnafoos, 1998).

As we have argued before, the metaphor is probably the most used rhetorical figure in our daily language, and therefore in political language as well. Metaphor is seen as an instrument of cross-domain mapping, whether in thought or in language, or simply put, the understanding and experiencing of something based on something else (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Steen (2008) advanced contemporary metaphor theory in adding the concept of “metaphor in communication”; he connected to the older rhetorical tradition, while acknowledging contemporary metaphor concepts. A metaphor transfers words or groups of words into a different, alien context – for instance into politics. The figure of speech often attracts particular attention because of the contrast between two substantially different domains (i.e. the difference between source domain and target domain). The interaction between the original meaning (source) and the sphere in which the source is transferred (target) consequently generates new meaning (Beer and De Landtsheer, 2004, pp. 9-10; and see also Chapter 2 for further elaboration).

Why are metaphors of importance in politics? Metaphors are the heart of emotion in political language. Metaphors appeal to the emotions of the audience and therefore have persuasive effects (Kövecses, 2000; Gibbs, Leggitt and Turner, 2002; Sopory and Dillard, 2002). This idea of emotions and metaphors is based on theories derived from the field of cognitive psychology. Emotions are the cognition’s directors: they select our beliefs, indicate our priorities and determine our attention, and they even distort the entrance

to our memories. Metaphors have similar effects: they guide our knowledge into a specific direction (Feder Kittay, 1987). By using metaphors we categorize and choose a certain perspective. Moreover, metaphors are emotional language elements that are particularly suitable as a rhetorical device in the process of ‘management of anxiety’ (either reassurance or frightening)^{xv} (e.g. Gaus, 2010). It is known that dissatisfaction, and the feeling to be an outsider, are breeding grounds for populism and extremism (e.g. d’Anjou, 2003; Mudde, 2004). According to Taran (2000), metaphor use resembles the mythical thinking of extremists^{xvi}.

Metaphor analysis as a method

Similar to the analysis of metaphors as part of political crisis-communication in Chapter 3, we study the metaphorical language of Wilders in this chapter by means of the method of Metaphor Power Index (De Landtsheer, 2015; see also Chapter 2 for broader elaboration on this method). The Metaphor Power Index (MPI or MP-Index) is a quantitative overview of the metaphoric power of a certain text. A high MP-Index indicates strong metaphorical power including a high level of emotions that is directly aimed at connection with the public. A low MP-Index refers to text or speech that is weak in metaphor power, which aims at persuasion through argumentation and logic, rather than emotions.

The Metaphoric Power Index is calculated based on the indices of the metaphoric frequency (MFI), the intensity (MII) and the content of the imagery (MCI). To calculate the frequency of metaphors (MF) it is necessary to define and detect a metaphor. A metaphor is the outcome of an interaction between the actual subject (target) of discussion and the source that is used to literally describe the subject from a different sphere of life – an alien name, and which creates a new meaning. The more rare, abnormal, novel and surprising the cognitive substitution of meaning is, the more likely it is to recognize the metaphor (Gibbs and Colston, 2012). A famous Wilders metaphor is the ‘tsunami of islamization’, which deals with a political subject (the subject of the metaphor is entitled the target or the frame). However, at the same time it uses the tsunami as an image from another sphere of life, namely a disaster, as a “source”, (the source is also called the vehicle or the focus of the metaphor) (Richards, 1936; Black,

1962; Feder Kittay, 1987; Cacciari, 2001). MFI shows the frequency of the number of metaphors per 100 words in a certain text, in which, more metaphors lead to higher MF-values.

The intensity variable (MII) represents the degree in which the 'different sphere of life' (e.g. the technique) still exists in (the new meaning of) the metaphor. Does one still connect 'tsunami' (of islamization) to an actual tsunami (as a natural disaster), which is being highly original in terms of the political phenomenon of immigration, or is the term established in our daily notion (which is considered normal intensity), or so conventionalized in our discourse that the association is weak or even has totally disappeared (which is called a dead or ghost metaphor) and that only 'new meaning' is being perceived? This variable thus deals with the novelty and originality of character of the metaphor. The use of more intense, creative and/or new metaphors leads to a higher MI-index at the scale of intensity (classified in 1: weak – 2: average – 3: strong, respectively with their values 1, 2, 3).

The content variable (MCI) ranks content categories in ascending degrees based on their emotional potential and to what extent they confirm or disturb the existing order in life. When it is expected that the individual can exert less self-control on his own situation, it is likely that politicians will use stronger metaphors. This empirically validated content scale contains six ascending categories: *Popular* or everyday-life metaphors (P); *Nature* metaphors (N); *Technical*, navigation, construction, political and other sophisticated metaphors (T); *Violence* and disaster metaphors (V); *Drama*, sports, film, theatre, opera, history, bible and games metaphors (D); *Body*, disease, medical and death metaphors (B) (De Landtsheer, 2009, 2015). In the content variable, the metaphors that can call upon stronger emotions (categories 4-6: 'violence', 'drama' and 'body' metaphors and are given corresponding values of respectively 4, 5 and 6 points) lead to higher MC-values. The lower categories (1-3: 'popular', 'nature' and 'technical' metaphors, also with their corresponding values 1, 2 and 3) lead to a lower MC-index.

The calculation of the Metaphoric Power Index is the result of multiplying the metaphoric frequency per 100 words, the intensity variable (1-3) and the content level (1-6): $MPI = MFI \times MII \times MCI$. The MP-Index reveals the metaphoric style character of a specific political discourse. Logically, politicians who use less metaphors, less

intense metaphors, and metaphors that arouse no or mild emotions receive lower MP-scores than their counterparts. From previous MPI studies it is known that certain circumstances or variables indicate the use of a higher number of and more powerful metaphors: political, military and economic crisis; gender (male); political party (or ideology), i.e., extreme (right); choice of medium (television, commercial and popular); the format or intention (persuasive communication); and elections (see e.g. De Landtsheer, 2007, 2009; De Landtsheer and Vertessen, 2010; De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004; De Landtsheer and Kalkhoven, 2012). The average MP-Index as derived from all research indicates an index number of '5'. Regardless the above circumstances that evoke a higher number of metaphors, this is the general 'breaking point': MP-indices above 5 are perceived as high and below 5 indicate low metaphoric power. For example, the MP-Index for the press releases of the Belgian-Flemish extreme right-wing party "*Vlaams Belang*" (VB) is $MPI = 8.73$ and that of its predecessor "*Vlaams Blok*" is $MPI = 8.35$. Also in interviews with Flemish politicians, the average MPI of the politicians of *Vlaams Belang* ($MPI = 11.56$) is significantly higher than other (mainstream) politician (av. $MPI = 4.29$ (De Landtsheer and Vertessen, 2010).

Data and procedure

The material has been analysed in two ways: a thematic analysis and a metaphoric analysis. Both concern quantitative content analyses in which the material has been coded by three expert coders. One of the coders was responsible for the coding of the entire sample, which took place in consent with and under supervision of the other coders.

The quantitative content analysis is based on the titles of the twelve sections in the party program of the PVV 2010-2015 (see Table 7.1). Every column, opinion piece and press release is given one of these subjects that is applicable for the content of the text, or in case none of the twelve themes covers the subject, it is placed in category thirteen ('other').

Table 7.1: Themes in the Party for Freedom's party program (PVV 2010-2015).

Nr.	Category	Examples
1	Security	More police, no community services, more TBS [involuntary commitment], re-education camps, ...
2	Reducing Islam and mass immigration	No dual nationality, burqa ban, taxing head scarves, total immigration stop for people from Muslim countries, ...
3	Democratization (Anti-politics)	Binding referenda, no European super state, no European army, more transparency about EU expenses, abolishing EUP, Netherlands Antilles and Aruba out of realm, elected mayors, abolishing First Chamber, ...
4	A social Netherlands	AOW remains 65 years, stop re-integration, no access of Bulgarians to Dutch labour market, admission of Poland rollback ...
5	Health care	More care staff, no increase of own risk, stop Islam in care centres, no electronic patient file
6	Education	Colleges do not merge with University, freedom of education is a fundamental right, close Islamic schools, language test toddlers, ...
7	Our Culture (Nationalism)	Judeo-Christian and humanist roots as the dominant culture, one public broadcasting, public communications only in Dutch, the Dutch flag on every school and on every public building, Dutch in the Constitution, ...
8	Enterprising	Lower taxes for citizens and entrepreneurs, fewer regulations, roll back of smoking ban, no restriction on Sunday sales...
9	The Netherlands in the Foreign policy (Anti-internationalism)	Fight against Islam must be the focal point of foreign policy, development aid limited to emergency aid, abolishing trade barriers, ...
10	A better environment	No 'climate policy', no CO2 storage, more nuclear power stations, ...
11	Safe living and more roads	No airport taxes, enforcement mortgage interest deduction and rent subsidy, ...
12	Animals, farmers and fishermen	Emergency number for animals, professional animal police, animal rights in Constitution, ...
13	Other	

The data that is used in order to examine the metaphorical language of Wilders consists of 23 columns (14,643 words in total, average of 636 words per column), 18 opinion pieces (14,206 words, av. 789) and 39 press releases (6,323 words, av. 162). The texts are taken from the media database of the official PVV website and Geert Wilders' personal website^{xvii}. The total database of $n = 35,172$ words concerns the time period from September 2004 to June 2010.

The empirical case: the language of Geert Wilders

General findings

Themes

In general we can state that all analysed formats (columns, opinion pieces and press releases) indicate the evidence of right-extremist themes. Homeland security, anti-politics, immigration and nationalism are the main subjects discussed by Wilders. Health care, education, environment, animals, and other subjects have not or barely been addressed to. This result meets the expectation that the rhetoric of Geert Wilders contains right-extremist themes (see Table 7.2).

Following the general overview fascist themes are prominent subjects, above all 'Security' (theme 1: 10 times), 'Immigration policy' (theme 2: 13 times) and 'Democratization' or 'Anti-politics' (theme 3: 14 times, 5 times in both columns and press releases, and 4 times in opinion pieces). 'Reducing Islam and mass immigration' or in short 'Immigration' (theme 2: 13 times, 5 times in columns, 7 times in opinion pieces, and 1 time in a press release) takes a second place. 'Security' comes at third place (10 times), above all in columns (5 times) and press releases (4 times). Other prominent themes are 'Nationalism' (theme 7: 9 times, with 5 times in press releases) and 'Foreign policy' (theme 9: 8 times).

Table 7.2: Metaphoric Power Index (MPI) in columns, opinion pieces and press releases of Geert Wilders (2004-2010)

Theme Nr.	Category	Total		Columns		Opinion articles		Press reports	
		N	MP-index	N	MP-index	N	MP-index	N	MP-index
1	Security	10	9,274	5	9,845	1	8,707	4	6,635
2	Reducing Islam	13	9,199	5	13,539	7	6,877	1	3,030
3	Democratization	14	7,962	5	7,901	4	8,366	5	5,030
4	A social Netherlands	2	3,240	0		0		2	3,240
5	Health care	5	5,148	0		0		5	5,150
6	Education	4	6,051	0		0		4	4,471
7	Our culture	9	6,432	2	7,193	2	3,754	5	10,310
8	Enterprising	0		0		0		0	
9	Netherlands and foreign policy	8	10,193	2	9,069	2	10,843	4	11,773
10	A better environment	3	14,021	1	17,950	0		2	6
11	Safe living and more roads	0		0		0		0	
12	Animals, farmers and fishermen	2	10,560	1	14,420	0		1	2,139
13	Other	10	7,795	2	9,736	2	12,291	6	9,972
Total		80	8,642	23	10,093	18	7,942	39	6,862

Metaphors

Regarding the total scores we also can state that the rhetoric of Geert Wilders displays a strong metaphorical style. The average MP-Index of MPI = 8.642 is sufficiently high. The themes ‘The Netherlands in our foreign policy’ (theme 9: MP = 10.193), ‘Security’

(theme 1: MP = 9.274) and ‘Immigration’ (theme 2: MP = 9.199) show the highest MP-Indices. Theme 3 (‘Democratization or Anti-Politics’) and theme 7 (‘Our culture or nationalism’) demonstrate slightly lower MP-scores (respectively MP = 7.962 and MP = 6.432). Surprisingly, the themes ‘Environment’ (theme 10) and ‘Animals, farmers and fishers’ (theme 12) achieved higher MP-scores than all right-wing themes, however, these themes appear only respectively 3 and 2 times and is therefore not a significant result.

Columns

As Table 7.2 shows extreme right themes such as ‘Security’, ‘Immigration’ and ‘Anti-politics’ appear the most in the personal columns of Geert Wilders.

The average MP-Index score for all columns is rather high ($MP_{\text{column}} = 10.093$). The columns have been written by Wilders himself for the website *GeenStijl.nl* (‘NoStyle.nl’). Due to these characteristics the website *GeenStijl* has been branded in different media as “the representative of the gut feelings” or “shock-log”^{xviii}. The style that can be found in the columns corresponds with the general style of this website: full of sarcasm, directness, openness, sharp criticism and (intentional) resistance to (or lack of) political correctness, journalist principles and nuance.

The following themes achieved extraordinarily high MP-Index scores: Theme 2 ‘Immigration’ (MP = 13.539)^{xix}, Theme 10 ‘Environment’ (MP = 17.95)^{xx} and Theme 12 ‘Animals, farmers and fishers’ (MP = 14.420)^{xxi}. In these columns we find metaphors that arouse strong, emotional messages. Right-extremists need strong, emotive and persuasive language to present their radical policy proposals as acceptable and necessary. We can conclude that the columns contain many metaphors and that they achieve average to high intensity and high/very high levels of contents indices, which indicates more emotional metaphors. In total we counted 368 metaphors, of which 94 have the subject of *technical* metaphors, 70 of *violence and disaster* and we counted 35 *body* metaphors. Finally, 40 metaphors have been found with a strong intensity (value 3) and 102 as medium (value 2).

Opinion pieces

Also within the format of the opinion pieces the right-extreme themes are overrepresented. 'Security', although more often subject in columns, is frequently mentioned in opinion pieces. Also 'Nationalism' is one of the themes, although similar to columns, 2 times (see Table 7.2).

The opinion pieces contain many metaphors, 274 in total, that achieve normal (79) or even high (32) intensity and rather high levels of content (MC) which indicates more emotional metaphors. We counted 35 *violence* metaphors, 24 *body* metaphors and 19 *drama* metaphors. The other metaphors appear in the three lowest categories, most of them (91) in category 1, *popular*. Focusing on opinion pieces alone, it appears that the language contains a high metaphorical power ($MP_{\text{opinionpiece}} = 7.942$). Although the MP-score at the themes 'Security' and 'Immigration' is a bit lower than with the columns, it is still an above average MP-score. In the opinion pieces a lot of (powerful) metaphors can be found, achieving medium/strong intensity. The highest scores can be found within the theme 'Foreign policy' (MP = 10.843)

Press releases

Again, most attention goes to the themes 'Security', 'Anti-politics' and 'Nationalism', whether 'Immigration' is barely discussed in the press releases. Also themes like 'Health care' and 'Education' have been mentioned, unlike in the columns and opinion pieces. Although this indicates a broader and more comprehensible medium format, the results from press releases are still in line with the general results (see Table 7.2).

The press releases show 141 metaphors in total, of which 77 can be placed in the lowest category (*popular*), whereas 95 metaphors achieve a weak intensity and 41 metaphors a medium intensity. Not only are there fewer metaphors found, the press releases also contain less powerful metaphors, which explains the relatively lower MP-Index score ($MP_{\text{pressrelease}} = 6.862$). Nevertheless, the press releases still contain are metaphors construct very powerful and emotional messages. Table 7.2 shows high MP-Indices for the themes 'Nationalism' (MP = 10.310)^{xxii}, 'Foreign policy' (MP = 11.773)^{xxiii} and the 'Other' category (MP = 9.972).

Exclusively based on press releases, the metaphorical language is more diverse. Certain traditional populist themes like 'Security', 'Anti-politics' and 'Nationalism' achieve high MP-scores, but a low MP-level for 'Immigration', a classical extreme right theme, leads to a different conclusion.

Conclusion and discussion

This chapter examined both the content and style of the Dutch politician Geert Wilders based on the themes that appear in Wilders' politics and his metaphoric style. Due to his strong statements, his controversial attitude and aberrant political style Geert Wilders has changed the political landscape in the Netherlands in the last decade. Style and content go well together in the politics of Geert Wilders and his PVV.

The results in this study show in the first place that extreme-right themes, such as security, immigration, nationalism and anti-politics, especially play an important role in columns and opinion pieces by Wilders. In press releases there is also room for subjects like education, health care and the environment. Furthermore, the methodology of the Metaphor Power Index traced the power of the use of this stylistic element. The general MP-Index in Geert Wilders' discourse appears to be, with MPI = 8.642, above average (considering the 'breaking point' that was settled at MPI = 5.0). Especially the metaphors that are connected to classic right-extreme themes ("Nationalism", "Security", "Immigration") have a strong impact. We may conclude that Wilders practices a 'metaphorical style'. This style has a potentially high persuasive power, that strongly appeals to emotions.

Can we state from these results that Geert Wilders stands for a populist or extreme right discourse? This study concludes from a theoretical point of view that the ideology propagated by Wilders and the PVV thematically inclines to classic right-extreme parties. The overrepresentation of the mentioned right-extreme themes in the party program, and in the other examined forms of communication, indeed supports this hypothesis. However, the political rhetorical style that Wilders handles is, due to the lack of nuance, the exaggerations, and the anti-political discourse, strongly connected to a radical right populist style. We conclude therefore that expressing a right-extreme ideology goes together well with a populist rhetorical style.

NOTES

i This support is called *gedoogsteun* in Dutch, which can be translated as toleration support: the PVV tolerated most of the government's policy. For that sake the government drew two versions of 'agreement': the coalition agreement (between VVD and CDA) and an additional 'tolerance agreement' between the governing parties and the PVV.

ii See e.g. <http://www.allepeilingen.com>

iii E.g. *De Volkskrant*, August 8 2007, http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proces_Geert_Wilders, and NOS, December 18, 2014, <http://nos.nl/artikel/2009573-om-vervolgt-geert-wilders-wegens-discriminatie.html>

iv Source: <http://www.bnr.nl/nieuws/politiek/306985-1311/pvv-en-front-national-samen-tegen-europa>

v See for instance: <http://www.nu.nl/algemeen/2113180/wilders-ziedend-etiket-extreem-rechts.html>

vi Original quote in Dutch: "Populisme heeft een negatieve connotatie in Nederland. Naar de kiezer luisteren vind ik eerder iets moois, in die zin is populisme een geuzennaam". (Wilders, in *NRC Handelsblad*, March 12, 2011)

vii The book by Wilders *Kies voor Vrijheid. Een eerlijk antwoord* (2005) informs us about how he sees himself.

viii *NRC Handelsblad*, March 12, 2011

ix On Buitenhof, Dutch public television 'Nederland 1', January 16, 2011

x E.g. <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/09/22/wilders-tegen-rutte-doe-eens-normaal-man/>

xi See e.g. "Spong: Wilders has Norwegian blood on the lips"; *De Volkskrant*, July 30 2011

xii http://www.art1.nl/artikel/1341-Wat_is_extreem-rechts_-_de_band_met_jongeren, read on February 21 2010.

xiii Wilders not only takes on the hatred against Muslims but also against the social-democrats, embodied by Job Cohen, the mayor of Amsterdam: 'The city of Job Cohen. What brought 2009 to Amsterdam? Above all, more crime. More robberies, more threats, more abuse, more burglaries. Murder and manslaughter. What Job Cohen did to Amsterdam, he wants to do it to the Netherlands. A vote for Job Cohen is a vote for mass immigration and a vote for crime' (Accountability debate of 2009, May 20 2010) <http://www.pvv.nl/index.php/component/content/article/36-geert-wilders/2945-inbreng-geert-wilders-verantwoordingsdebat>, read on May 25 2010

xiv Although this issue has been subject of debate, especially after the July, 2011 assaults in Norway (e.g. *De Volkskrant*, August 6, 2011)

xv For example, a famous metaphor that Wilders uses regularly is the 'tsunami of islamization', in which the connection is being made between the political phenomenon of *islamization* (the growing number of Muslims that have immigrated into the Netherlands) and the natural disaster of a tsunami. A complex phenomenon (immigration) is simplified by the use of the metaphor. Moreover, a different, negative connotation is created, as the word 'tsunami' is likely to arouse negative emotions such as anxiety and unrest.

xvi Edelman's 'Language of the Helping Professions' (1974) helps us to capture how metaphors work in an extreme right ideology. The 'medical' imagery that the Nazis used in their hate speech against Jews is an extreme example of how metaphors can be used in a destructive way. Jews have been described by the Nazis in terms of disease and deadly plagues, whereas the Nazi leaders were given the role of 'doctors' who were we able to 'cure' society, by 'exterminating' the Jewish population. These 'diseases' were presented as life-threatening and were meant to create unrest and anxiety in society. This extreme example proves that the (systematically) use of (certain) kinds of metaphors can influence public opinion on humanity and society (Musolff, 2007).

xvii <http://www.pvv.nl/index.php/in-de-media>. This is the link to the media-archive of PVV. Texts are also to be found on <http://www.geertwilders.nl>.

xviii <http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/GeenStijl>, read May 21 2010

xix Example Theme 2: 6-02-2007 (translation). "Was a terrorist such as Mohammed B. unstoppable, the tactics of penetration, propaganda, repentance and demographic change will indeed prove successful if the cowardly political elite from PvdA over CDA and VVD to SP and their European spiritual relatives remain silent about it, and demonize those who do not so".

xx Example Theme 10: 7-08-2007 (translation). "So our country will be further clogging, which means an economic disaster. (...) Let them promote their apocalyptic climate hysteria using their own financial resources".

xxi Example Theme 12: 21-08-2007 (translation). 'Unfortunately, increasingly the circus is the victim of animal activists, or rather of animal terrorists'.

xxii Example Theme 7: 2-12-2009 (translation). 'The Ikon attacks each week the PVV voter' and 'The Ikon has been hijacked by the left-wing elite'.

xxiii Example Theme 9: April 8 2010 (translation). When it comes to the admission of a country in the European Union Wilders can respond violently: 'they suddenly also Wilders come knocking at the EU door and we must go remove debris (...) Europe already cost us clutches with money'.

CHAPTER 8: “A PIECE OF TRASH OF THE WORST CABINET EVER”

“What a mess. What a huge mess. What a travesty.”

What a farce. What a disgrace, an embarrassment to this

government, a disgrace for the Netherlands, a disgrace for

our ‘sorry Prime Minister’. What an incredible amateurism.

What a beginner’s work. What a monstrosity.”

Geert Wilders

(November 13, 2012, in Dutch parliament)

This chapter is based on the following publication:

Kalkhoven, L. and De Landtsheer, C. (2016). “A Piece of Trash of the Worst Cabinet Ever”. *The Rhetorical Use of Exaggeration by the Dutch Populist ‘Party for Freedom’*. *Politics, Culture and Socialization*, 6(1), 49-68.

Abstract

The populist politician Geert Wilders expresses a distinctive rhetorical style, as the previous chapter shows, but it would be too firm to conclude that this metaphoric analysis provides us with a complete picture of the political rhetorical style of right-extremists or populists. The metaphor is only one, although a very important, indicator in a possible series of different style features. It would be necessary to examine other rhetorical variables of Wilders. This chapter examines the presence of another important rhetorical figure in political speech: *hyperbole*.

Although political language in general is alive with rhetorical strategy and rhetorical devices, it is argued that the discourse of populist radical right politicians surpasses, and distances itself from, the rhetoric of 'mainstream' politics. It is assumable that rhetorical exaggeration, also known as hyperbole, is one of these important rhetorical features that suites the deviant populist style.

In order to test this hypothesis, we use the political context of the Dutch House of Representatives and focus (again) on the populist politician Geert Wilders and his party PVV. The degree of hyperbolic language is compared to other parties in parliament in the Netherlands. Similar to Chapter 4, we used methods based in earlier research of hyperbole that enables to identify and to analyse this rhetorical device. The analysis is based on a representative research sample ($n > 160,000$ words) of political language in Dutch parliamentary debates, between 2006 to 2013.

Results show an extraordinary high use of hyperbole by members of the Dutch populist party PVV, which is nearly twice as high as the average, and noticeably are the recurring intense and exclusively hyperbolic interventions in the political debates. The findings confirm the hypothesis that hyperbole fits the typical figurative, exaggerated and aggressive populist discourse style. Geert Wilders and his party PVV clearly deviates from other politicians with a distinctive hyperbolic rhetoric: his metaphorical exaggeration, the lack of nuance, the hyperbolic references to populist principles and the anti-political discourse resemble the prototypical style of populists.

"A PIECE OF TRASH OF THE WORST CABINET EVER"

Introduction

The rhetoric of populist radical right parties is an interesting subject for research in general, yet certainly in the Netherlands. The Dutch political landscape went through a metamorphosis in the past decades. It was once (seen as) the paragon of stability and tolerance, in which the tone of debate was predominantly formal and (on complex social issues such as immigration) mainly conflict avoiding. But as a result of major political issues, such as the assassinations of the politician Pim Fortuyn (May 6, 2002) and filmmaker Theo Van Gogh (November 2, 2004), and the rise of populist political movements, the political discourse endured a radical change. According to Schuyt (2006) a general emergence of 'advertising language' occurred: "harsh, loud, extremely exaggerated, unreal, with every minute a repetition of what just has been told" (Schuyt, 2006, p. 34). There is a significant number of studies that indicate the deviant use of language and discourse by Dutch extremist and populist politicians, which in recent years is almost exclusively focused on the person of Geert Wilders and his party PVV (see e.g. Vossen, 2010, 2011; Kuitenbrouwer, 2010; Van der Pas, De Vries and Van der Brug, 2011; Bos, Van der Brug and De Vreese, 2013).

This study aims to add to these researches by making a systematic analysis of the rhetoric of the populist radical right party PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*; i.e. Party for Freedom¹) in the Netherlands. The novelty of this research is that we focus on one of the most prominent rhetorical tools that characterize radical and challenging populist political language: the rhetorical use of exaggeration, which is known as *hyperbole*. Hyperbole can be defined as an exaggerated form of phrasing in which words or a clustered group of words express an exceptional or even extreme representation of reality (e.g. McCarthy and Carter, 2004; Brdar-Szabó and Brdar, 2010). Although academic literature surprisingly lacks a practice of research into hyperbolic utterances in political discourse, many scholars recognized that hyperbole actually is an important rhetorical

figure in the realm of political persuasive language (e.g. Van Dijk, 1993b; Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; McCarthy and Carter, 2004) and hypothetically a key-element in a populist radical political discourse that is assumed to be highly rhetorical, *'unparliamentary'*ⁱⁱ, offensive and negative (Bull and Simon-Vandenberg, 2014).

Theoretical insights

The rhetoric of the populist radical right

The rise (and considerable popularity) of so-called populist radical right parties (Mudde, 2013, 2014) in the past decades have led to an increase of academic studies in which factors of the (varying) success of these movements have been dissected in great detail. A large amount of attention is given to the attractiveness of the ideological values, as we have seen in the previous chapters, which is based on "nativism" (i.e. ideology based on 'native' elements in which the nation is seen as an exclusive and homogeneous state), to the importance of leadership and authoritarianism, and to the fact that these parties share aspects of populism (Canovan, 2002; Mudde, 2013). Although populism can be defined ideologically, as an ideal of "the virtues people against the corrupt elite" (e.g. Taggart, 2000), the most recurring key elements are the specific use of stylistic features, language, discourse and rhetoric that unite most parties of the populist radical right and seem to be to most effective in all of these 'success factors' (Kalkhoven, 2013b). As many (mostly West) European countries experienced populist radical right parties as a relatively new phenomenon, numerous case studies analysed the discourse and rhetoric of these party leaders in recent yearsⁱⁱⁱ.

Although political language in general is full of rhetorical strategy and specific rhetorical devices, it is argued that the discourse of populist radical right politicians surpasses, and distances itself from, the rhetoric of 'mainstream' politics (e.g. Taggart, 2000; Abts, 2004; Canovan, 2004)^{iv}. Moreover, the numerous case studies often present very similar results with regards to the rhetorical strategies of radical right party leaders. Recurrently mentioned are particular argumentation techniques, in which uncertain matters are presented as plain facts (as objectively true), whereas arguments of the opponent are being depicted as dubious or even invalid opinions (Van Dijk, 1993b;

Potter, 1997). The actual argumentation is, according to several scholars, often rather allusive, insinuating, irregular, demagogic and offensive (e.g. Bonnafous, 1998; Wodak, 2002; Van der Valk, 2003). An attempt to turn the tables through answer avoidance, denial (of accusation) and personal (counter) attacks, frequently results in a role-play of blaming and victimization (Bonnafous, 1998; Wodak, 2002; Simon-Vandenberg, 2008; Bull and Simon-Vandenberg, 2014).

Characteristic of populist rhetoric is the reference to (the principles of sovereignty of) the people and (criticism of) the (intellectual, political) elite (Bos et al., 2013). This manifests itself in clear, direct and simplistic language, as it is supposed to fit the everyday language and common sense-thinking of the (ordinary) people (e.g. Müller, 2002; Abts, 2004; Curran, 2004). The style that is fit to accompany the populist rhetoric is therefore persuasive, emotive and (regularly) offensive (Wodak, 2003; Kalkhoven, 2013b). As we have argued in previous chapters in this dissertation, well-known rhetorical devices are frequently used, such as strong and vivid metaphors (e.g. Bonnafous, 1998; Porro and Russo, 2001; Wodak, 2002; Van der Valk, 2003), repetition (Van der Valk, 2003; Kuitenbrouwer, 2010), short and (over-) simplified 'main clause'-language^v (e.g. Bonnafous, 1998; Wodak, 2003; Simon-Vandenberg, 2008; Van Leeuwen, 2012), and hyperbolic language (Van Dijk, 1993b; Abts, 2004).

How does this relate to Geert Wilders and his party PVV? In the previous chapter (Chapter 7) it was concluded that the language of this Dutch politician propagates a distinctive radical right populist ideology, focused on classic right-extreme themes such as security, (anti) immigration, nationalism and anti-politics. Wilders is above all famous for his style and rhetoric: he is praised for his outspoken standpoints, clear and plain phrases, and decisive leadership, to which he (at least) partially owns his electoral success, but at the same time condemned for being highly aggressive and offensive^{vi}, hyperbolic and hysterical, and evasive for argumentation and (real administrative) responsibilities (e.g. Van Leeuwen, 2012; Bos et al., 2013). As argued in the previous chapter, his metaphorical language, the lack of nuance, the exaggeration, and the anti-political discourse, resemble the prototypical style of populists. Especially powerful war imagery and rhetorical exaggeration (among other stylistic figures), as common "weapon in the (political) conflict between different groups" (Schuyt, 2006, p. 34), are characteristics of Wilders' discourse (De Landtsheer et al., 2011; Van Leeuwen, 2012).

Van Leeuwen (2012) analysed lexical categories of Wilders' language and concluded that the adverbs and adjectives that he uses are remarkably often located at an endpoint of a semantic scale such as the scale on quantity (e.g. "nothing-everything"), intensity (e.g. "extremely-to a small extent"), and time (e.g. "always-never"). Whereas this phenomenon is also addressed to as 'promotional language technique' (Van Leeuwen, 2012, p. 91), it is also very similar to the rhetorical figure of hyperbole.

Hypotheses

Whereas exaggeration in daily-life language is a very popular and common – often even unnoticed – rhetorical habit, in political language it is not granted as such (McCarthy and Carter, 2004). In a political context, using hyperbole can be a well-considered rhetorical action, as hyperboles rather easily catch the eye and are possibly risky style elements. Strategically speaking, on the one hand, politicians can *choose* for non-rhetorical, non-hyperbolic language following the conventions of parliament. On the other hand, much is allowed in order to challenge the opponents, to empower the argument and (an attempt) to persuade the public. Additionally, as we argued, populist language is highly rhetorical in nature, and many everyday linguistic devices appear to occur in a more frequent or enlarged form than in mainstream politics. Populist language is therefore often perceived as an extreme, often exaggerated form of public language, in which the intentional use of hyperbole can and often is a rhetorical strategy in political persuasion (e.g. Wilson, 1990; Van Dijk, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Formisano, 2008; see also Chapter 4). Whereas mainstream political language is undoubtedly hyperbolic to some degree, strategically speaking it can be expected that the degree of hyperbolic language differs between different political parties, with the populist party at the utter end of the hyperbolic scale.

Consequently it is presumable that different parties – committed to different political ideologies and to different 'roles' within the parliament – contain their own characteristic form of rhetoric (e.g. De Landtsheer and Vertessen, 2010; a result that was also suggested in Chapters 3 and 4). Therefore we might expect different hyperbole use per different party. First of all, it is expected that the strategic use of exaggerated language is more beneficial in circumstances in which opposing views are expressed

in discourse – as a form of criticizing the current policies – whereas in circumstances in which policy is ought to be defended, mitigated and reassuring language is more advantageous. We thus expect significantly higher degrees of hyperbole use among politicians in opposition than in parties affiliated to the government (which we call government parties).

Secondly, we do expect significant differentiation between political parties, not only in the frequency, but also in the content of hyperbole use. It is argued that an exaggerated discourse, which fits models of verbal aggression and polarization, seems particularly applicable to populist and extreme political discourse (e.g. Van Dijk 1993b; Abts, 2004). As we argued, a populist style of discourse is seen as persuasive, emotive and rhetorical in nature and the particular occurrence of 'hysterical' discourse in politics is often attributed to right and left extremism and populism. In the study in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, the use of hyperbole was analysed in the case of the Flemish Parliament. The study revealed that the use of hyperbole correlates to a negative value of the exaggerated, which means that most hyperboles are negative evaluations such as criticism or even cynicism, instead of positive overstatement or laudation (which is in line with the results of a study by Colston and O'Brien, 2000b). Moreover, differences in frequency and qualification of exaggeration between different political parties showed that especially parties that are 'opposed' to the incumbent political elite (such as opposition parties) significantly use more rhetorical exaggeration. This applied above all for the so-called radical parties at the right of the political spectrum^{vi}, whom achieve the highest levels of hyperbole use, and express a more 'populist' form of exaggeration, by regularly referring to the general or common sense of the mass (e.g. "we all know that...") and a strong oppositional standpoint against the political elite (e.g. "again nothing was accomplished"). This result gives ground to the expectation that hyperbole – as are several other rhetorical figures – particularly fit the exaggerated style of populist and extremist political language, as is often theorized, but seldom empirically validated. As a following, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: Opposition parties use significantly higher degrees of hyperbolic language in the political debate than government parties.

H2: Political parties at the endings of the political spectrum show significantly higher degrees of hyperbole use than political parties of the centre.

H3: The political party classified as populist party (PVV) shows hyperbole use that significantly differs from that by the mainstream parties, in concrete they use higher frequency and more negative hyperboles.

Methodology

Based on a checklist of criteria by McCarthy and Carter (2004), a methodology was developed in order to apply the label 'hyperbolic' to a singular expression or extract in text or talk, which we explained more comprehensively in Chapters 2 and 4 of this dissertation. The systematic identification of hyperbole on a large-scale, which is applicable for all sort of (political) communication, as pursued in this study, follows three basic steps. First of all, as by definition a phrase or sentence is hyperbolic if we witness a rhetorical figure of speech (often metaphorical) and/or an extreme expression of reality, often supported with certain syntactical clues (more on this in McCarthy and Carter, 2004). Second of all, the utterance can only be considered a hyperbole when there is an enlargement (*auxesis*), in which something is depicted in larger terms than reality is. Following the criteria of McCarthy and Carter (2004) this can either mean a disjunction with the context (when it seems 'odd' within reference to the real world) and/or when the assertion is simply counterfactual (impossible or very unlikely). However, step three tests for 'realistic sense' of the utterance, as purposely lying, absurdity or plain rubbish statements it will give an could be considered exaggeration, but is not rhetorical in nature). In Chapter 2 we discussed the (development of the) methodology and illustrated the detection of hyperbole by the following phrase from the political debate (and also from the title of this chapter) as an example:

[1.1] "Today we discuss the Budget [...], {a} a piece of trash of {b} the worst cabinet everviii."
(Wilders, PVV, 26/09/2008 in Dutch Parliament).

Table 2.2 showed the three steps that are processed in order to detect the hyperboles in this sentence. First of all, the phrase contains two extreme case formulations (ECF's) 'ever' and 'worst' that indicate an extremity or enlargement, and secondly, a metaphorical exaggeration ('a piece of trash'). We thus count two separate hyperbolic utterances in this sentence^x. Furthermore, both hyperboles are enlargements and extremities of the literal reference, odd in the context of the political debate, factually very unlikely and

could (or should) be perceived as figuratively. It is however probably perfectly clear what is meant by the politician, as the statement can make sense to the observer. Hence, when a coding of a (randomly) selected text is made, one segregates the text into segments (phrases or sentences) and distillates the different (clustered) hyperboles, asking oneself the question whether there is presence of an exaggeration (extremity, enlargement) either by the extreme formulation or through a figurative overstatement. In the example that is given, we count therefore two hyperboles (hyperbolic utterances) in a context of fourteen words (which gives a certain hyperbole ratio or density).

People are, through convention and experience, mostly well capable of sensing what is meant hyperbolic and what is not, but it is rather challenging (and novel) to systematically identify hyperbole in a scientific way. The difficulty lies above in the fact that hyperbole can exist in many different forms and, as we argued, is strongly dependent of its context. Although hyperbole is often compared to – and in fact often intertwined with – other rhetorical devices such as extreme case formulation (ECF), metaphor, verbal irony and understatement (e.g. Gibbs, 1994; Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; Colston and Keller, 1998; Haiman, 1998), it should be considered as a distinctive figure of speech. Hyperbole is not equal to ECF alone, as it sometimes surpasses the extremeness of the reality (the 'enlargement' or *auxesis*^x in classical rhetorical terms) and can (and often does) occur as a non-extreme, figurative (metaphorical) overstated representation of reality (Norrick, 2004).

A substantial observation is that a lot of hyperboles actually occur in the form of metaphorical expressions, rather than ECF. That is why the coding's first step asks for differentiation in both ECF enlargement and figurative overstatement. Consider, for example, the differences in hyperbole use in examples [2.1] and [2.2] below. Whereas the first example shows clear extreme case formulations in the semantic sense of universalities (see e.g. Cano Mora, 2009), the second example illustrates the frequent use of 'popular' metaphorical exaggerations and figurative magnifying expressions:

[2.1] "In the meantime, everybody can peek inside" (...), "as quick as it has never happened before" (Pechtold, D66, 22/09/11); "whereas every number, except for the page numbers perhaps, is unclear" (...), "everything is possible", "(...) soon we will have all room in society" (Pechtold, D66, 26/03/09).

[2.2] "(...) whereas the Netherlands breaks every Olympic record in the discipline of national waste of talent. [...]. And at the same time that's my biggest fear. [...]. Because the ink of this report was still wet and the coalition already choose (...)" (Dezentje Hamming-Bluemink, VVD, 15/04/08)

Finally, hyperboles can occur either as (extreme) negative or positive evaluations of a respectively negative or positive situation^{xi} (Colston and O'Brien, 2000b), although it also happens regularly that the exaggeration is neutral (when no evaluation is made). The *hyperbole value*, which is included as an extra qualitative variable, depends on the situation (the reference) to which the exaggeration is being set. Example [1.1], for instance, clearly marks two (very) negative evaluations of two negative (in the eyes of the politician) realities: evaluating the Budget as not only bad or worthless but as 'a piece of trash', and the cabinet as 'the worst ever' (as it could not be more negative).

Data and procedure

This study of rhetorical use of exaggeration in political language is executed through content analysis of Parliamentary debates in the political case of the Netherlands. First of all, we use the criteria as described above in order to perform a quantitative study of hyperbole occurrence (frequency) and evaluation (value). The frequency is calculated by the hyperbole *ratio*, i.e. the number of singular hyperboles per 100 words. The value is measured by the relative share of either positive or negative hyperboles to the total number of hyperboles in a text sample. The evaluation can be translated into a scale between 0 and 2, in which the value '0' expresses only positive and '2' entirely negative hyperboles in a text sample.

The substance (or content) of the used hyperboles is also of considerable importance. This would allow us to answer not only the question whether the hyperbole use between parties differs, but also to what extent. Especially, with the focus on the distinctive characteristics of hyperbole use of the populist party PVV, this will be a valuable contribution. Therefore, it is useful to make a qualitative discourse analysis of the exaggeration that has been used by the politicians, in order to identify certain recurring patterns in the hyperbole content.

For the quantitative study we used a random sample of political parliamentary debates

in the Dutch House of Representatives (called the 'Second Chamber'), (more or less equally) divided over the years (2006-2013) and seven major political parties^{xii} (some permanent smaller parties are excluded from the sample, because of the absence of different politicians in parliament, and the lack of participation of these parties in general in the political debates). The text samples have been randomly selected from documented reports at the database of the official website of the parliament (at *zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl*)^{xiii}. This all resulted in a research sample of 196 text samples^{xiv}, with a total sum of over 160,000 words, which is used for analysis. The initial database of samples has been analysed a first time according to the coding scheme^{xv} by the authors, after a series of pre-tests in order to test the internal validity and usefulness of the instrument regarding the quantitative identification and value scoring of hyperboles. After the first coding round, a new comparison session took place, which resulted in a Cohen's inter-coder reliability of $\kappa = .60$ (which is considered a moderate agreement according to Landis and Koch, 1977). Minor changes to the coding scheme have been made after the post-tests (see more on the procedure: Chapter 2). Finally, based on the evaluation of agreements and disagreements between the coders, the total sample has been analysed a second time, in order to settle the inclusion of missed or wrongfully coded hyperboles. The interpretation of hyperbolic categorization and content (the qualitative part) has been executed by the author, using in-depth content analysis. Further categorical trends and substantive particularities are also noted, regarding the content of the selected hyperbolic language. It is by no means intended to make all-embracing or generalizable conclusions on the content analysis part, but it does provide a useful insight of differences in hyperbole use.

Results

General quantitative analysis

The ratio of hyperbole use in the analysed data of political language is HB-ratio = 1.44, which means that politicians in the Netherlands use an average of 1.44 hyperboles per 100 words (i.e. approximately 3 hyperboles in every 200 words) in their political speech in parliament (see Table 8.1). With an average value of 1.26, the hyperboles that are used

appear, as expected, to be more negative than positive (given that the HB-value-scale goes from 0 to 2, in which a HB-value of 2 is entirely negative). In line with earlier results (e.g. in Chapter 4), a moderate positive correlation is found between the frequency of hyperboles and the value ($r = .387, p < .01$). Although this correlation is not as strong as expected, it again implies that in general the more hyperboles are being used in politics, the more negative they appear.

Table 8.1: Mean hyperbole ratio and value per political party in the Dutch parliament (Second Chamber)

Party name (and position)	Hyperbole-ratio	Hyperbole-value
CDA (centre-right)	.95	1.25
D66 (centre)	1.38	1.29
GL (centre-left)	1.43	1.26
PvdA (centre-left)	1.12	1.16
PVV ^{vi} (right)	2.43***	1.35
SP (left)	1.60	1.34
VVD (centre-right)	1.18	1.15
Average	1.44	1.26

*** $p < .001$ (using ANOVA and Tukey HSD Post-Hoc tests)

Differences on party-level

Clear significant differences in hyperbole use are found within different parties and the political role they pursue (see Figure 8.1). Opposition parties use about twice as much hyperboles as parties that are affiliated with government (so-called governing parties): $\text{HB-ratio}_{\text{government}} = .83$ versus $\text{HB-ratio}_{\text{opposition}} = 1.69$ ($SD = 1.00, p < .001$) and tend to be significantly more negative in their exaggeration as well: $\text{HB-value}_{\text{government}} = 1.13$ vs. $\text{HB-value}_{\text{opposition}} = 1.31$ ($SD = .24, p = .001$). These outcomes are in line with hypothesis 1. However, if additional independent variables are taken into account, we see that this also applies for the difference between the individual politicians 'role' either being the party leader or a non-leader both in frequency (resp. $\text{HB-ratio}_{\text{leader}} = 2.03$ vs. $\text{HB-ratio}_{\text{non-leader}} = 1.14, p < .001$) and value ($\text{HB-value}_{\text{leader}} = 1.31$ vs. $\text{HB-value}_{\text{non-leader}} = 1.23, p < .05$).

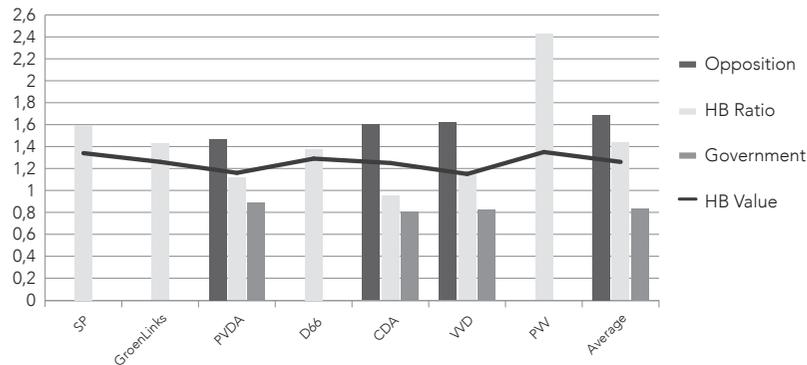
It is also suggested that male politicians use more hyperbole in their communication in parliament than female politicians ($\text{HB-ratio}_{\text{male}} = 1.53$ vs. $\text{HB-ratio}_{\text{female}} = 1.23, p < .06$). On party-level we see that only one party significantly differs in HB-ratio from all other parties: the populist PVV. All other parties have similar (i.e. non-significant differences) hyperbole ratio and value scores.

However, when we focus on individual differences on party-level we do find some significant results. Figure 8.1 below not only shows the average hyperbole ratio and value (as expressed in Table 8.1), but also reveals the distinction of the average hyperbole frequencies for parties that have had a role in both government and opposition during the selected time period (all other parties have been only opposition parties). These three parties (PvdA, CDA and VVD) make approximately twice as much use of hyperbole in their oppositional role than in their period in government ($p < .001$). The liberal party VVD, partly in government and partly in opposition during the analysed period, is a clear example of how this difference can be expressed. Especially party leader Mark Rutte, current PM of the Netherlands, but also other politicians who have governmental functions have below average hyperbole ratios. Their frequency of hyperbole use all barely exceeds $\text{HB-ratio} = .0$, which means that they hardly use any single hyperbole (see also Chapter 5), whereas Mark Rutte and the VVD average during opposition is second-highest of all the political parties, even above the average of the socialist opposition party SP. See for instance example [3.1] for Mark Rutte's hyperbolic rhetoric as opposition leader:

[3.1] "This part of the debate can {a}only lead to one conclusion", (...) "there's {b} no rhyme or reason to it and it is {c} really {d} absolutely nonsense", (...) "In that case we {e} just cannot conclude anything different than (...)" (Rutte, VVD, 26/03/09)

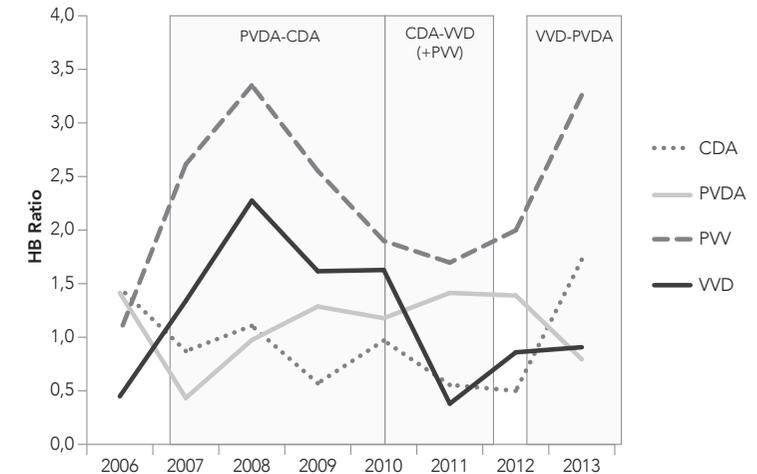
Although the parties at the ending are mostly opposition parties, and whereas the populist radical right party PVV significantly differs from the other parties (see Table 8.1), we cannot conclude that the political parties at the endings of the political spectrum show significantly higher degrees of hyperbole use than political parties of the centre. Hypothesis 2 is therefore so far rejected.

Figure 8.1: Average hyperbole ratio (frequency), with the distinction between parties' role as government versus opposition, and value (negative/positive evaluation) per party in the political debate in Dutch parliament^{xvii}



It is interesting to evaluate the evolution (or fluctuations) of the HB-ratio regarding the parties that have been in both governing and opposition parties (see Figure 8.2). Between February 2007 and October 2010, when the parties CDA and PvdA formed the government, their average HB-ratios remain more or less stable (rather low), whereas VVD reaches very high scores. This suddenly changes afterwards, when the new government of VVD and CDA is formed: the hyperbole use of VVD in parliament drops significantly, while the average of PvdA slowly increases. From the latest period, VVD and PvdA delivered the government, the sudden rise of CDA's average HB-ratio is noticed. Additionally interesting, is the evolution of PVV, although not officially part of any government. After the first success of the elections in 2006, the party's language in debates can be characterized as highly hyperbolic. Nevertheless, we can see a firm drop of the hyperbole frequency in the years 2010 and 2011: the years in which PVV gave authorized parliamentary support to the minority coalition of CDA and VVD.

Figure 8.2: Average hyperbole use (HB-ratio) throughout time for parties that have been both governing and opposition parties (composition of government is indicated on top)



Note: PVV has not officially been part of the government in the CDA-VVD Cabinet (Rutte I), but gave *parliamentary support* to this government between October 2010 and April 2012

The fact that the role of party leader seems utterly important is supported by the significant difference between the two variables in hyperbole frequency. The clearest example of the deviant party leader in comparison to other MP's of the same party can be found at the democratic-liberal party D66. Whereas the average hyperbole frequency of the MP's is rather low ($HB\text{-ratio}_{D66_MPs} = .75$), party leader Alexander Pechtold uses metaphorical rhetoric and eloquence combined with clear overstatement and hyperbole use ($HB\text{-ratio}_{D66_Pechtold} = 2.35, p < .001$). The same particular distinction between party leader and non-leaders also applies for the populist party PVV, where party leader Geert Wilders really exceeds all other politicians with an average hyperbole use of $HB\text{-ratio}_{PVV_Wilders} = 3.69$. Although the other MP's of the PVV party also achieve a fairly above average ratio ($HB\text{-ratio}_{PVV_MPs} = 1.83$), it is still only half of the frequency of their leader.

As it appears, hyperbole especially suits a negative rhetorical style in politics, considering the higher share of negative use of hyperbole over positive use, and the positive correlation between hyperbole ratio and value. It may not come to a surprise that hyperboles are being used in a negative way. Most parties use hyperbole to express a kind of negative feeling, mostly in a form of indignation, irony or cynicism. This also differs between parties, in which the degree of negativity almost proportionally inclines to the position of the political parties in the parliament. Whereas the centre (and regularly governmental) Labour party PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid*) expresses a selective indignation as a hyperbolic frame (in words of expressions and in metaphors), to empower argumentation and in reaction to other politicians or events (example [4.1]). The green party *Groenlinks* (GL) and the socialist party SP, both in opposition, are more cynical and personal in their exaggeration (resp. [4.2] and [4.3]):

[4.1] "The *Partij van de Arbeid* expressed its total dismay yesterday about the deafening silence (...)" (Albayrak, PvdA, 03/02/11)

[4.2] "(...) because that allows you, like no one else, to repair the mistakes that you have made in the past 30 years", (...) "I ask that question as it seems that your students, youth and their future do not play any significant role in this [coalition] agreement", (...) "it strikes that people are actually totally absent" (Halsema, GL, 26/10/10)

[4.3] "(...) than the Prime minister really has a blind spot", "[people] are being left alone by this cabinet (...). People get to hear: we're sorry, you cost too much" (Roemer, SP, 22/09/11)

The exaggeration of the populist radical right

The quantitative analysis shows that the populist radical right party PVV excels in hyperbole frequency: the party achieves a significantly higher number of hyperbole use (HB-ratio_{PVV} = 2.43, $p < .001$) in comparison to all other parties (average: HB-ratio = 1.44). There are multiple findings that deserve attention here once we look at the hyperbole use in more (qualitative) detail.

First of all, whereas most hyperboles used in the parliamentary debates are situated in the semantic subfields (Cano Mora, 2009; see also Chapter 2) of *completeness* and *absoluteness* (e.g. 'completely', 'totally', 'absolutely', 'entirely') and *universality* (e.g. 'all-or-nothing', 'everyone-no one') politicians of the PVV use numerical expressions

and other *quantitative* hyperboles much more frequently as a form of exaggeration in comparison to other parties (a similar results we found with the extreme right party VB in Chapter 4):

[5.1] "Billions of Euros have been wasted" (De Mos, PVV, 14/10/09)

[5.2] "(...) the juggling with money starts again. The money vanishes with buckets out of the Treasury"(...), "the Minister has had oceans of time to (...)" (Brinkman, PVV, 10/10/07)

Not only does this party achieve the highest degree of hyperbole ratio, but rhetorical exaggeration seems often to be intertwined in the populist discourse of the party: several contributions to the parliamentary debate are almost completely – i.e. line for line – hyperbolic, a result that we find with no other party. The following example^{xviii} gives an impression of the unusually high hyperbolic density in the discourse by the PVV:

[5.3] "What a mess. What a huge mess. What a travesty. What a farce. What a disgrace, an embarrassment to this government, a disgrace for the Netherlands, a disgrace for our 'sorry Prime Minister.' What an incredible amateurism. What a beginner's work. What a monstrosity." (Wilders, PVV, 13/11/12)

Furthermore, the exaggeration is generally sincerely aggressive, harsh, offensive and personal, but at the same time often also very original and creative in choice of words. An offensive and polarizing style can be found in often personal attacks against political opponents, especially at the left side of the political spectrum, as the examples [5.4] and [5.5] show, but towards any party if necessary [5.6]:

[5.4] "The Hague's ruling clique [politically elitists] and the leftist (...) elitists are being sort of 'weepy weepy' in the hallway. We see that also today. And hear her whining! Little girl Halsema [party leader of *Groenlinks*] with her wet eyes, her cuddle cloth pent-up in her mouth, throwing dolls" (Wilders, PVV, 26/10/10)

[5.5] "At that time his Maoist fists appeared to be stuck deeply in his ears" [about SP leader Marijnissen]. (...) "Mister Cohen [leader PvdA] completely trembles with rage", "We wave from the ship to sourly left, that impotently tries to make a fist. At the beach, Miss Sap [leader GL] still bungles and practices somewhat with her plug" (Wilders, PVV, 22/09/11)

[5.6] "In particular, the VVD should be totally ashamed. The mess this party makes of our country is unprecedented: first [they] promise the voter everything - tax cuts - and then they

do exactly the opposite, namely tax increase. All promises are being sacrificed on the altar of Brussels." (Wilders, PVV, 05/03/13)

Finally, PVV politicians express a certain 'populist' reference in their exaggeration regularly, in the understanding of populism as being 'from and to the people' and as referring to common sense. There are multiple references to the general will (or attitude) of the people (as a cohesive mass) (e.g. "the people demand..." or "everybody knows that..."), but also by using very simplistic (almost childlike) and/or typically common Dutch expressions, as will be illustrated by the last example [5.9]:

[5.7] "[They] bargain the interests of the *hardworking Dutchman* [citizen] with a horribly bad, left Budget. That is deeply sad. The *citizens in our country* deserve so much better" (Wilders, PVV, 19/09/07)

[5.8] Thirty years policy of tolerance has been thirty years of misery. My fraction *does not need any scientific research* about this tolerance policy to draw this conclusion. This conclusion is evident; *facts of common knowledge don't require proof*." (De Roon, PVV, 06/03/08)

[5.9] "I'm not only angry, I'm furious. I'm furious about the answer that colleague Van Geel [CDA] just gave [...]. Mister Van Geel then said that there was little space to change not even one millimetre to this government document. To put it in common Dutch: we are sitting here like Simple Simon [*voor Piet Snot* in Dutch]. The Chamber looks like a fool [*staat in haar hemd*]. [...]. We will not participate in this fake debate. [...]. After that statement of mister Van Geel I'll predict you, (...), that at the end of this day not a single, but really not one single motion by you or by anyone else will be passed. He is not taking us seriously. [...]. Mister Van Geel, it's my turn now. The point is that finally someone needs to stand up and say: we won't swallow this. We won't take it from you (...) that you put the Chamber offside [*buitenspel zetten*]. I'd say: have a lot of fun; we're taking off now. Good bye." {*The attendant members of the PVV-fraction leave the assembling room*} (Wilders, PVV, 26/03/09).

Conclusion

Considering the premise that (intentionally) using rhetorical figures in political language can serve a strategic, persuasive purpose, it was expected that how, when and to what extent hyperbole occurs in the political discourse depend on certain 'conditions'. Depending on the (perceived) level of social instability, political parties can benefit from

the use of hyperbolic language as part of their political communication. Additionally, the specific role of individual politicians also turns out to be a predicting variable for the differences in degrees of hyperbole use. Politicians in official administrative functions tend to be more careful about what they say and how they express themselves. This could make them more cautious about perceived untruths or gaps in their statements (e.g. factual errors). Party leaders, especially members of parliament (and above all at opposition parties) are central figures, of who it is expected to express themselves rather severe and eloquent.

We expected that political parties at the endings of the political spectrum show significantly higher degrees of hyperbole use than political parties situated in the centre, and additionally, that the one political party that can be classified as 'populist party' (PVV), shows significantly deviant hyperbole use compared to the 'mainstream' parties, which will be revealed in a higher degree of hyperbole use and in more negative values. Although centre parties achieve lower degrees of hyperbole frequency in their discourse, there is no real quantitatively significant difference between most political parties when it comes to hyperbole frequency and negative or positive evaluation. The only significant deviant results, however, can indeed be found in the populist right-wing party PVV. The language of the PVV in the Dutch parliament debates, seems almost hyperbolic in nature. Although it was theorized and therefore expected, the deviance of this party compared to all other parties in the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical tool, is remarkable and encourages further research of populist language in general.

NOTES

i Geert Wilders (PVV) is leader of the biggest opposition party (since 2010 the PVV has been subsequently the third largest party of the country) and has been *parliamentary supporter* of the Rutte I government. Between October 14 2010, and April 23, 2012 (when the cabinet collapsed) the PM Mark Rutte's party VVD (liberals) and the Christian Democratic party CDA formed a minority government (less than half of the electoral seats) and therefore depended on the support of the biggest winner of the 2010 elections: Geert Wilders' party PVV (Party for Freedom).

ii It is argued that political language merely reflects the public discourse of the time being (e.g. Wilson, 1990), but this comparison is not entirely justified. Within the walls of the houses of parliament, politicians hold a special – both privileged and restricted – place. As Bull and Wells (2014) argue: "They can be as partial and as unashamedly partisan as they choose. Criticism and accusations are permitted in the House. Furthermore, MPs are protected by parliamentary privilege, which allows them to speak freely (...) without fear of legal action on grounds of slander" (p. 32). However, as the authors continue, members of the parliament are (conventionally) expected to behave (and also speak) in a certain appropriate and polite sense (as they have an exemplary role in society). Therefore, politicians should not be perpetrate (to) '*unparliamentary language*': "they should not be abusive or insulting, call another member a liar, suggest another MP has false motives, or misrepresent another MP" (Ibid, p.32).

iii Such as *Front National* in France (Bonnafous, 1998; Surel, 2002; Van der Valk, 2003), *FPÖ* in Austria (Wodak, 2002, 2003, 2009; Müller, 2002), *Vlaams Blok/Belang* and other parties in Belgium (e.g. Coffé, 2005; Erk, 2005; De Cleen, 2009; Jagers, 2006; Swyngedouw and Ivaldi, 2001; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Simon-Vandenberg, 2008; Pauwels, 2010, 2011), *Lijst Pim Fortuyn, Trots op Nederland* and the *Party for Freedom* in the Netherlands (Vossen, 2010, 2011; Van Leeuwen, 2009, 2012), and other parts of Western Europe such as Scandinavia (Rydgren, 2002, 2004).

iv There is, conversely, among scholars a growing support for the theory that the rhetoric of Western European mainstream parties has become more populist over the years (e.g. Mair, 2002; Mudde, 2007). However, an analysis of party programmes by Rooduijn, De Lange and Van der Brug (2014) shows no evidence for this hypothesis (yet) (see also: Bos and Brants, 2014).

v The mentioned authors refer to this 'short-and-sweet' language in different ways, such as talking in main clauses without subordination, in vague slogans and one-liners, simplification as the result of low integrative complexity, etc., but it refers to more or less the same idea.

vi Wilders has on many occasions openly clashed with other politicians in parliament. For instance, he urged the Dutch Prime Minister to "behave normal" and called him "loony", as well as that he called a former Minister "insane" and "completely nuts" (see e.g. Van Leeuwen, 2012; Bos and Brants, 2014).

vii Which are in the Flemish case the populist party *LDD* and the extreme right party *Vlaams Belang*

viii Translated from Dutch. Original citation: "Wij spreken vandaag over de begroting [en de Miljoenennota 2009], een flutstuk van het slechtste kabinet ooit."

ix Notice the fact that we count two separate hyperboles in one singular phrase: {a} 'a piece of trash', referring to the budget, and {b} 'the worst cabinet ever'. Cano Mora (2009) explains the identification of separate hyperboles by referring to hyperbolic items, rather than a hyperbolic utterance: "[b]y hyperbolic item I mean the minimal unit of sense or meaning, whether a word, phrase or expression, which per se, given the appropriate context,

conveys an idea of excess or extremity. In turn, different hyperbolic items may co-occur within a single utterance and form hyperbolic clusters (e.g. lots of people have got nothing to do)" (2009, p. 28). Thus, although they coexist in only one sentence, different hyperbolic utterances (as well as repetition of the same hyperbole) should always be counted as individual (or separated) cases, as they express two different ideas that are overstated. This is, subsequently, a matter of context: exaggeration {b} contains two ECF's ('worst' and 'ever') but the phrase only obtains its rhetorical exaggeration due to the sequence (and combination) of the words, and is therefore counted as one hyperbolic utterance.

x In classical literature two kinds of hyperbole are distinguished: *Auxesis* (or exaggerated intensification/enlargement) and *Meiosis* (or exaggerated reduction/attenuation) (see e.g. Smith (1675) in McCarthy and Carter, 2004, p. 151).

xi A positive evaluation of a negative situation (or vice versa) also exists in the shape of (verbal) irony, which shows that hyperbole and irony are closely related to each other (Colston and O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b)

xii See Chapter 2 for more information on the political system of parliaments in the Netherlands, and Appendix A for an overview of the political parties included.

xiii A random selection of tekst samples is generally based on every first usable contribution of a party in the debate in four time periods per year (e.g. January, April, August, November).

xiv A singular text sample consists of a consecutive contribution of a member of parliament (or government) during a political debate in the Dutch Parliament.

xv See Appendix C for an impression of the coding scheme.

xvi Note that the party PVV (Party for Freedom) significantly differs from all other parties at a level $P < .01$ (using a Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test) at least, in hyperbole ratio whereas all other parties do not differ significantly from each other.

xvii Note: the political parties are roughly categorized on an ideologically left-right scale, with the Socialist Party (SP) being the most left, and Party for Freedom (PVV) being the utter right party. It is, however, arguably a too simplistic representation of the ideological differences (and distances) between the parties (see also Chapter 6).

xviii For the sake of readability the hyperboles in this example have not been underlined. We count, however, no less than twelve hyperboles in this phrase (each sentences contains at least one hyperbole).

CHAPTER 9:

DISCUSSION AND

CONCLUSION

"This conclusion is evident;

facts of common knowledge don't require proof."

Raymond de Roon (PVV)
(March 6, 2008, in Dutch parliament)

DISCUSSION

Contributions, limitations and paths for further research

Although this chapter is the closing section of this dissertation, one could say we are only at the beginning. Figuratively speaking. Doing (empirical) research and writing it into one coherent thesis is above all making choices. These choices – including the main approach, the questions that are asked, the directions of research, the limitations of time and space – lead to the conclusion that there is still more unravelled than there is yet told. Whereas I believe that this dissertation as a whole makes a significant contribution to the academic fields of political, communication and linguistic sciences, we also acknowledge the limitations of (the different studies in) this work. This part attempts to show the contributions of the dissertation, but simultaneously aims to discuss the gaps that remain due to rather neglected, underdeveloped and/or obscured issues, as a consequence of the choices that have been made or simply due to circumstances outside the range of influence. At the same time, it creates a good opportunity to make recommendations for future research on the topics of this thesis.

Descriptive, comparative, but not *explanatory*

Although in recent years the interest for empirical research on political rhetoric has grown massively (see e.g. Condor et al., 2013, for an overview) the number of quantitative content analysis studies on rhetoric is still rather limited. Moreover, the link between different variables such as (the rhetorical) hyperbole and (the cognitive) integrative complexity is hardly ever done. It is my belief that this dissertation therefore makes a contribution to the existing research field. Additionally, this dissertation contains newly developed methodology of analysis in fields of study that are rather neglected or undiscovered as yet, such as the examination of hyperbole as a political rhetorical element. The combination of different and original methodologies to analyse particular rhetorical figures is not only a renewed and unique contribution to political, linguistic

and social science, it is also an examination of current and real-life political realms. As is elaborated on more profoundly in Chapter 2, the multi-methodological combination of quantitative and qualitative research is a choice by design. Methods of content and discourse analysis in political language are traditionally derived from qualitative linguistic analyses, and only a few studies have ventured to take a more quantitative approach. Moreover, complex and unfamiliar phenomena such as the uprising of radical right populism and extremism in politics change political language completely and it makes researching it probably more necessary than before. This is why it is particularly important to explore the broadly unknown territory of specific political discourses and (systematic) language differences between politicians and parties.

Yet, the exploratory character of the chapters captures a limitation of this dissertation at the same time. The different studies are above all descriptive in order to delineate characteristics of rhetoric in political discourse. The second step was to compare these characteristics within different political parties and other variables that were regarded as influential. Although there has been taken initiative to explain variance (e.g. crisis, role, ideology, populism as determining factors), the studies are restrained from real explanatory analysis. The questions to what extent do these rhetorical strategies explain ideological or other independent variables' differences, and how determinative is the variance based on rhetorical difference, are at this stage not totally answered. Yet, we do have a better idea of the rhetoric of one of the ideologies described, i.e. populism. However, populism and the rhetoric of populist politicians, as well as similar phenomena as extreme right or extreme left, are subjects that still need more analysis in order to fully capture them. I strongly believe that further and more in-depth research is required and definitely necessary in order to meet all these questions.

What are the *effects* of rhetorical persuasion?

A second limitation associates with the points of discussion above. Political rhetoric is, as argued in the introduction chapter, above all aimed at political persuasion. From a theoretical perspective it was asserted that persuasion through rhetorical style elements is assumable, but it is a very slow and protracted process. Rhetorical effects often operate at a latent level of *pathos* (emotion) and *ethos* (character), which is argued to be easier and more successful than through manifest rational argumentation (*logos*), but even at

an unconscious level it is difficult to make people change their attitudes. The question that rises to the surface after the examination of several particular rhetorical content analyses is what (or which) effects are attributed to the use of these 'rhetorical strategies' that have been mentioned regularly by now? Are people going to feel, perceive things or even behave differently due to rhetorical devices in political language? Besides, what can we state about the extent of success or failure of a political party concerning the contribution of rhetorical devices in political debate (or other forms of communication)? These important questions are rather left unanswered.

Rhetoric (as are rhetorical style elements) is not a magic key for politicians to open a door to linear persuasion of potential voters, nor is it a toolbox from which one can pick a rhetorical tool in order to work on his/her strategic project. Persuasion works in many different ways and differs from person to person. Some people are more susceptible and open to persuasion than other people, and some rhetorical devices have more in-depth and/or last-standing effects than other rhetorical variables. Effects of rhetoric are very difficult to establish empirically, mainly because rhetorical persuasion is assumed to be a long-term and latent effect, in which influence of particular isolated rhetorical devices on 'the public' is complicated to measure on a longitudinal basis. Nevertheless, it would be of high value to examine the persuasive effects of rhetoric in future research, which can for example be done (though with its own limitations as touched upon in Chapter 2) by conducting experimental studies on (potential) attitude change as a result of variation in rhetorical variables and the degree in which they are being used.

Additionally, it is important to emphasize that every form of communication is always inherently rhetorical in a certain way, but as such not by definition intentionally strategic. The effects of rhetorical communication can either be perceived intentional (as strategy) or unintentional (as 'side-effects'). Persuasion through rhetoric can thus also be an accidental activity.

Limitations of *measuring* rhetorical variables

The variety of (newly developed) research methods, and the lack of space to elaborate on it in each individual empirical article, led to the inclusion of an extra chapter (Chapter 2: Methodology explained) entirely dedicated to the methodology that is

used in the different chapters. Admittedly, measuring rhetorical variables is not an easy exercise, especially in a quantitative way. As discussed in Chapter 2, the difficulty of measuring rhetorical variables is often the principle of validity, and as a result (especially) the objectivity and reliability of the measurements. It was desirable from the outset to make the empirical studies at least partly quantitative studies, so it would allow for comparison of the results e.g. between parties. Quantitative content analysis has multiple advantages. First of all, methods are systematic, objective and (therefore) repeatable. Secondly, almost every kind of verbal communication (written and spoken) can be scored, regardless of era, language or topic (e.g. Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977). Moreover, it allows us to analyse real-life political communication, thus not artificial data, and is therefore highly (ecologically) valid. At the same time it is acknowledged that methods for quantitative rhetorical content analysis should take into account that most rhetorical variables are context dependable, changing and variable, and have often much more underlying value than is usually measured at the surface (that is why qualitative analyses are included as well). The outcome was that analyses could not be ceded to computer-mediated programmes. Manually obtained results, however, are more susceptible for issues of validity, in which one could question the way that the measurements are handled, and how objective and generalizable the results are. It is, after all, still human's work.

In Chapter 2 I elaborate on these matters and try to reduce the uncertainty of reliability to a great extent. The most important aspect is the procedures of coding (or scoring) and the different steps that are taken in order to make this a valid exercise. For all of the rhetorical studies it holds that the development of the procedure is a long-term, continuous process that consisted of pretesting, testing, and retesting. There a multiple precautions made, such as the training of coders, the division of (the same) data over several coders and the calculation of inter-coder agreement. Although for most of the studies we achieved (eventually) satisfying inter-rater reliability scores, the agreement on the hyperbole frequency remained rather lower than expected (a moderate Cohen's Kappa agreement of $\kappa = .60$). After many hours of testing and consulting, it was decided to continue the analysis nevertheless, in which one of the coders (the author) rated the entire corpus of the studies for a second time. Despite the difficulties in the detection as described, we believe that the analysis of this rhetorical device is objective and reliable to the best extent, and gives us valuable results. The methodology on hyperbole was build

up entirely from zero and it developed along the way (and is in a sense still proceeding). It is therefore desired that it will lead to further research of this rhetorical element and with that also further development of the methodology that is proposed.

The *interaction* between rhetorical variables

Metaphor, hyperbole and simplification

In the introductory chapter it was argued that the choice to examine the rhetorical variables metaphor and hyperbole in specific, and the inclusion of the cognitive variable of integrative complexity, was deliberately made. Both figures of speech share common elements of functioning, (perceived) goals and interpretation. They both operate above all at a level of pathos (emotion), are highly persuasive in their function because they possess a certain element of depicting reality differently, and both have the function of simplification of language in a particular way, which links both of them – as we theorized – to the (level of) cognitive complexity of language. As the results in Chapter 5 show, there is a correlation between the use of hyperbole and the integrative complexity of a text – something that was earlier already established for the relationship between metaphor and I.C. (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004; De Landtsheer, 2007). However, there are two issues that deserve a bit more attention here, one about the interplay between the measured variables, and the other about the exclusion of other rhetorical variables.

First, as both metaphor and hyperbole are often intertwined with the other rhetorical figure (metaphors can be hyperbolic utterances, whereas hyperboles can be metaphorical of nature), and both are correlated to (low) levels of integrative complexity, the discussion can be raised whether separate variables are measure, or that there is an overlap of measurement. The question here is mainly: can one phrase express different rhetorical variables? We have argued that metaphors often occur in a discursive context of hyperbolic formulations (a metaphor is used to exaggerate reality). Likewise, many rhetorical exaggerations are ‘disguised’ as metaphorical (or sometimes analogical, ironic or other figurative) expressions. Throughout the studies it is demonstrated that hyperbole and metaphor are closely related to each other, as both can co-exist in one singular expression (which is also the case with other related stylistic figures such as

irony, humour, understatement, etc.). Whereas they occur very often simultaneously, we argued that it is important that these types of hyperbolic metaphors or metaphorical hyperboles are taken into account as well. Additionally, metaphor and hyperbole might share similar elements and occur in the form of one another, they are still by definition different types of rhetorical variables (see e.g. McCarthy and Carter, 2004, pp. 151-152).

The finding that there is a correlation between the rhetorical figures metaphor and hyperbole on the one hand and integrative complexity on the other hand implies that the use of these rhetorical variables (as especially Chapter 5 ascertains) and the level of complexity somehow affect each other. We concluded that the more these rhetorical figures are used, the less complex the language appears to be. This may not seem to be a big surprise as it was often argued before (but above all theoretically) that different types of rhetorical figures – and hyperbole in specific – make (political) language more simple and plain, and easier to understand and comprehend. But we have to keep in mind that rhetorical devices are linguistic and often semantic psychological features, whereas integrative complexity – as are other concepts of complexity – is a purely cognitive psychological construct. Moreover, the (level of integrative) complexity of language is not by definition linked to rhetoric, it does not concern the specific use of words (as is contrarily exactly the case with the use of rhetorical figures), and it is thus not a strategy of language, but rather a matter of structure: the cognitive efforts that are put in arguing or reasoning (e.g. in Baker-Brown et al, 1992). It is therefore interesting that we can link the cognitive structure of language to the rhetorical use of language and to its effects. The revealing proof that both are related to one another, due to a test of correlation, is finally established.

Other (related) rhetorical figures

Secondly, we have to deal with the fact that the dissertation is restricted to the examination of a limited number of rhetorical variables. Although metaphor and hyperbole are (among) the most prominent rhetorical tropes not only in our daily language but also in political communication (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; McCarthy and Carter, 2004; De Landtsheer, 2009; Cano Mora, 2009; Martin, 2014), it would indeed be interesting and probably necessary to take more – and especially different kinds of – rhetorical variables into account in additional research. It was argued before that both rhetorical figures of speech have connected tropes, considering that for example

idioms, analogies, metonymy and synecdoche are related to (or even subcategories of) metaphor, whereas understatement, extreme case formulation and verbal irony are often associated with hyperbole (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 for more elaboration on this). Although these rhetorical variables are regularly taken into account, but not as a separate figure of speech (e.g. a metaphor can occur as a synecdoche, a hyperbole is sometimes also meant to express irony), but for a better understanding it could be useful to distinguish between these related style items.

However, in relation to the cognitive complexity of reasoning, there is another aspect that could matter. It can be expected that most rhetorical figures¹ are associated with less complex – or simple – language because most figures of speech are meant to emphasize something, or to make a statement clearer and more comprehensible (e.g. Roberts and Kreuz, 1994). Nevertheless, there could also be figures of speech that generate the opposite result. In this perspective, the study of rhetorical figures such as understatement, verbal irony, or analogy could be specifically interesting to our beliefs, because these types of tropes are expected to be used less for explicit clarification but more for implicitly making a point, which could make reasoning more complicated. Additionally, it would be interesting to develop an experimental research setting in which the sequence of the use of different rhetorical variables and the varying level of complexity would be manipulated as that could give insight in the causal effect of rhetorical figures on the level of complexity.

Is it actually the rhetoric of *politicians*?

Earlier it was emphasized that all material that has been analysed in this dissertation (political debates, interviews, opinion pieces, etc.) are ‘real-life products’, thus not artificial, and that it is not affected by the context of the research. The benefit of the scoring procedures is that it guarantees ecological validity (i.e. in accordance with the real world). For example, when speeches in parliament by a certain politician are being examined, one can be sure that the speech has been written in the light of the political context, instead of in the light of the study of its rhetorical examination (as is often the case in experimental research designs). However, the truthfulness of this ecological validity is sometimes questioned, e.g. whether politicians’ acting, impression management or even lying influences the level of rhetorical behaviour (and is therefore

a false representation of reality). Furthermore, ‘ghost writers’ could purposely influence the rhetorical state of a text or speech, which would cause a manipulated version of the ‘real’ political language. Although it is plausible that political leaders, as part of a strategy, adapt a particular rhetorical strategy that is most beneficial to a certain circumstance, the question is rather if it matters and if they even succeed. For example, earlier studies on the level of integrative complexity found no difference in complexity (I.C.) scores between the genuine politicians’ utterances and language that was expected to be written for them, and additionally, “many studies show leaders scoring either low or high in [I.C.] when logic and common sense suggest that this is to their disadvantage” (Suedfeld, 2010, p. 1679; referring to studies by Wallace, Suedfeld and Thachuk, 1993; Suedfeld and Wallace, 1995; Tetlock and Tyler, 1996). Moreover, the appearance that politicians have in public (in the debate and/or in the media) is the foremost (and most likely the only) impression that the audience has. The publics’ (and voter’s) political decision will be based on this image only, whether that is a genuine representation or purely based on a deliberate strategy. Nonetheless, continuous study of the language and rhetoric that politician’s use, and the strategy behind that, remains therefore particularly important.

Matters of *context*

Throughout this dissertation I regularly mentioned the importance of the specific context in which rhetorical differences are measured. Context refers to external and internal circumstances in which the research cases are situated, such as the physical place and time. Also the settings – or the formats – that are chosen in which the examination takes place are highly influential for the outcomes.

Different format

First of all, this dissertation is entirely dedicated to differences in rhetoric in the political context. One important hypothesis, i.e. that political language is much more rhetorical than daily-life language, is rather left unanswered simply because at this point we do not know the average level of rhetoric in daily-life speech. Additional research should establish to what extent the use of rhetorical figures differs between political and public discourse. Furthermore, the studies in this dissertation are mostly focused on

the political debate as format of communication. Although Chapter 3 and Chapter 7 also take other forms into account, this could be extended to the variable of hyperbole. Additionally, it would also be interesting if the content of the political discourse would be compared to other forms of political communication. Thus, the level of rhetoric-oriented language in e.g. the political debate could be opposed against press releases, political speeches for mass audiences, columns or opinion pieces, and question-answer interview formats. Moreover, it is assumable that rhetoric contributes to the attention that is given to political language, not only by the public or other politicians, but also by (news) media. Future research could try to gain insight in the role of the media in respect to the attribution, distribution and even initiating of rhetorical statements.

Different place

This study is limited to the political contexts of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). One of the practical advantages, and even a main condition, is that the content analyses in the different chapters could be executed in the native language, which is in Dutch in this case. However, it is presumable that a specific language (dialect) and/or a country's culture are significant factors in the degree of rhetoric (or figurative language) that (common and political) text and talk contains or allows. For instance, we already witnessed a difference in average hyperbole use (HB-ratio) between the Flemish and the Dutch political contexts, in which the latter shows a much higher degree of hyperbolic language. This result alone asks for further explanation that cannot be given yet. In future research the impact of (cultural) context and language specificity may also be considered, i.e. the rhetorical character could vary between different languages; (linguistic) culture plays a role in the amount of figures of speech that is 'allowed'.

Additionally, not only Belgium and the Netherlands, but also many other countries in (Western) Europe (and beyond) are interesting political context for further examination of the populist phenomenon. Many countries face the same difficulties with populist and/or radical right parties. Although different studies in various countries show similar results when it comes to the rhetoric of populism, more (quantitative) research should be encouraged in order to establish these similarities (or possible differences) in greater detail. Furthermore, it would be worth to analyse rhetorical style similarities and differences between radical right and radical-left political leaders (e.g. in Latin-America) at large scale.

Do we actually measure *populism*?

Many scholars, who engaged themselves with populism as a research subject, face two main difficulties. First of all, one will at some point encounter the difficulties of defining a complex and unsettled phenomenon. Is it true, as Berlin (in Allcock, 1971) stated, that defining populism tends to have a 'Cinderella complex'? We try to find the perfect fit for the idea of populism, but no matter how hard we try, a search for the perfect fit is both illusory and unsatisfying. Laclau (1977) as well warned for the fallacy of defining populism: we see a phenomenon, we have the assumption of something called 'populism' and we try to define it. Next we look for examples that approach the original definition and study them. Then we redefine our definition so that it fits the examples we studied. The general definition ends up being significantly different than the original concept. It was attempted to avoid this problem by departing from a neutral and open point of view when it comes to the use of rhetoric in politics, before we searched for a framing of the concept of populism and the populist rhetoric.

It may be difficult to find a balanced and all-embracing definition of populism, nevertheless, as Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008) point out, the same applies for many complex phenomena in politics and society (such as extremism, radicalism, etc.) and should not discourage us to carefully investigate a definition of populism that enables to "understand and explain a wide array of political actors" (p. 3). Studying populism may be challenging, but to our beliefs also necessary. The studies in this dissertation on populism contribute to useful information and insights on the linkage between language and the specific use of words in the political debate, and the complex phenomenon of populism. Hence, it is above all starting ground for further examination of populist ideology and rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

In the first chapter of this dissertation it was argued that words are not harmless tools only to express oneself, since the way we use words and language matters in how we perceive the world around us, how we give meaning to it and determine power relations between people and societies. The (strategic) way we use words, or language in general, for the aim of persuasion, is known as rhetoric. The rhetoric used in political language, i.e. political rhetoric, is the central theme of this research thesis. The aim of the study was to analyse the use of different rhetorical variables, namely the use of the rhetorical figures of metaphor and hyperbole – and the connection to the level of cognitive complexity of reasoning – in political language. This dissertation attempted to describe the characteristics of (particular) rhetorical language by politicians in the Dutch-speaking political contexts of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) (descriptive analysis) and to mark differences in rhetorical language between the subjects of research (comparative research) with a special interest in political ideology, leadership and party's political 'role' in parliament, as well as to examine the effects of changing circumstances (e.g. in- and outside crisis situations) on the rhetorical communication. The second objective was to link (strategic) rhetoric to the particular language of populism and populist leaders in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). In this final concluding chapter I try to answer to these objectives by giving a recapitulation of the main findings that can be derived from the several empirical studies in this dissertation. Additionally, the different findings will be integrated into one coherent conclusion.

Main findings

Crisis rhetoric in political language

Crisis and crisis-like circumstances

In a first empirical study, Chapter 3, we examined the differences in communication style and rhetoric in different situations, depending on the presence or absence of political

stress. It was expected that due to the increased level of political stress in situations of political crisis (and 'crisis-like' circumstances), the rhetoric of politicians would change as well. We theorized that non-crisis rhetoric is characterized by expressive, cognitive and content-oriented discourse, whereas in times of (approaching) crisis the rhetoric shifts towards more impressive, emotive and audience-oriented communication. Changes in crisis communication style have been measured by implementing the Crisis Communication Combination (CCC) index, which relies on three main variables to assess the changes in communication style: the metaphor power, the pragmatic ambiguity of modal verbs and the integrative complexity. The study contained two kinds of 'crisis': the first case is based on two crisis cases in Flemish politics in parliamentary debates, while in the second study we examined changes in crisis rhetoric between elections and non-election periods in political interviews in Flemish newspapers.

First of all, both crisis cases indeed demonstrated a difference in crisis communication, and therefore in political rhetoric, between periods of crisis and non-crisis. In both cases the value of crisis rhetoric (measured on the CCC-index) in crisis times is approximately three times higher than in non-crisis periods. Secondly, we theorized that also elections cause social stress among politicians, or it could be artificially resemble a stress situation, which could also lead to changes in their rhetoric. Results show that election affects the political rhetoric that is used. The differences between elections versus non-elections times follow a similar pattern as the earlier obtained crisis versus non-crisis periods. Similarly, the value of crisis rhetoric is about three times as high in the build-up to elections than in times without elections and approximately twice as high directly after the elections were held (see Figures 3.2 and 3.6). This is why we labelled elections as crisis-like circumstances.

Differences in crisis rhetoric on party-level

Additionally, the results of this study confirm that the rhetoric between crisis and non-crisis times varies between parties at the political spectrum. Not only do we see that crisis rhetoric differs between parties (depending on the period of time), but also within each party. Although we only found minor rhetorical differences in non-crisis time between the parties (except for one party as I will discuss later), it seems that times of crisis, and elections as well, give cause for bigger differentiation in crisis rhetoric on a

party-level. Political parties tend to ‘respond’ to particular circumstances, act differently in their communication during these circumstances, whether or not deliberately. These differences within and between parties are on the one hand depending on context, e.g. it might explain the significant difference in rhetoric on the topic of the polluting flights in the DHL-crisis within the ecological party *Groen*, a theme that is of great concern for the green party. But differences in rhetoric can also be attributed to invariable individual differences and are therefore also party-dependable. On party-level, it is interesting that during crisis, or prior to elections, parties use crisis communication differently – more emotive, impressive, audience-oriented – than outside these periods. Although there is evidence that both in and outside crisis time the crisis communication of parties at the ends of the political spectrum is significantly higher than parties at the centre, the fluctuation in crisis rhetoric of the so-called centre parties – as their normal, regular communication consists more of cognitive, expressive and content-oriented language – may be even as remarkable as the overall highly emotive, impressive and audience-oriented language that parties at the ends of the political spectrum tend to use. Outside crisis or election periods most parties show great similarity and stability in reference to each other, although there is one great exception: the extreme right party *Vlaams Belang* (VB).

The findings from Chapter 3 result in three major preliminary conclusions. Firstly, differences in rhetoric depend for a large part on certain characteristics that can be attributed to a party (on a certain moment in time), such as the ‘role’ that parties (ought to) have in parliament. The most conspicuous result here is that in general the established centre parties, often also affiliated to the government at a moment – i.e. governing parties – such as the social-democratic Sp.a and the Christian-democratic CD&V, tend to be less rhetorical-oriented than more distinctive parties outside the political centre (usually opposition parties, such as the ecological party *Groen* and Flemish-nationalistic N-VA, at the time that they were in opposition). Secondly, and subsequently, ‘ideological difference’ seems somehow to be a determining factor in differences in communication style. And thirdly, certain parties show that it is possible to use a kind of permanent high level of crisis rhetoric, whether there is an actual period of crisis or election (ahead) or not.

Although this chapter focused specifically on crisis communication, it became rather plausible that the differences between political parties as described not only take place as a consequence of variance between crisis versus non-crisis situations, or in similar ‘political turbulent’ circumstances such as elections, but also in long-term political style variation in every day’s political language. The next empirical studies focused on the differences in use of rhetorical variables, i.e. hyperbole, metaphor and integrative complexity, and their relationship to (other) independent variables as explaining factors, such as party role and inherent party differences in ideology.

A party’s role and ideology as defining factors

Differences in the rhetorical use of exaggeration

In Chapter 4, and later followed by Chapter 5 and 8, we tried to establish the recognition of the rhetorical figure of hyperbole in political language in addition to the existing (and lack of) academic literature. Although in the domain of linguistic and literature studies hyperbole is a well-known and recognized rhetorical figure, and at the same time presumed to be an important part of political discourse, we made a first academic attempt to both quantitatively and qualitatively designate exaggeration as a rhetorical device in political language. The second objective was to describe what kinds of differences in hyperbole use between political parties (that all have their particular political ideology) and their role in parliament (between governing and opposition parties) exist, which contributes to a better understanding of rhetorical differences in contemporary ideologies.

Chapter 4, 5 and 8 show that hyperbolic language can be detected in different forms and frequencies among different political parties. The Flemish case (in Chapter 4) demonstrated that the average politician uses almost two hyperbolic phrases per 300 words in his or her talk during the political debate (or $HB\text{-ratio}_{\text{flanders}} = .64$). In the Dutch case this number is considerably higher, namely approximately three hyperboles per 200 words (or $HB\text{-ratio}_{\text{netherlands}} = 1.44$) on party-level (in Chapter 8), and even over two hyperboles per 100 words ($HB\text{-ratio}_{\text{party_leader}} = 2.23$) on individual level, i.e. party leaders in the Netherlands (in Chapter 5), which is significantly higher.

It was also revealed that the rhetorical figure hyperbole suits a negative rhetorical style in politics, considering the higher share of negative use of hyperbole over positive use, and the positive correlation (of approx. $r = .40$, $p < .01$) between the frequency (HB-ratio) and the value (HB-value) of use, which means that the more hyperbole one uses, the more negative they become. We may conclude that hyperboles are rhetorical devices that are suitable more for negativism, criticism, irony and cynicism than for positivism, (innocent) humour and laudation. The results in Chapter 4, but especially the Dutch cases in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8, show the distinctive and significant differences between parties' and politicians' role in parliament: opposition parties, as well as party leaders, show significantly higher degrees of hyperbolic language, which is in all studies around twice as high. Interestingly, it is also constantly revealed that politicians significantly change in the degree of hyperbolic language related to the shift of the party's role in parliament (see Figure 4.2, Figure 5.1 and Figure 8.2). The conclusion was drawn that politicians seem to be bound to the role and (related) task that they have in the political realm.

Differences in complexity of reasoning

Chapter 5 established a connection between political elites' cognitive efforts put in reasoning and arguing (the level of integrative complexity, or I.C.), and their rhetoric in which they express themselves. The study revealed on average a very low level of complexity (on a scale from 1 to 7) in the language of Dutch political elites ($I.C._{netherlands_party_leaders} = 2.20$), which is quite similar to the average I.C. score found in the Flemish case in Chapter 3 ($I.C._{flanders} = 2.83$). Further, we found a significant negative correlation ($r = -.443$, $p < .001$) between the use of hyperbole and the level of complexity in the language of political leaders in the Dutch parliament (meaning that simple language tends to be more hyperbolic than complex language), something that was earlier equally established with the use of metaphor (De Landtsheer and De Vrij, 2004; De Landtsheer, 2007). Moreover, this study showed that the levels of cognitive complexity and the use of hyperbole have similar patterns when it comes to the role in parliament and individual party/ideological differences. For instance, opposition party leaders are significantly less complex and more hyperbolic in their rhetoric than their counterparts from governing parties.

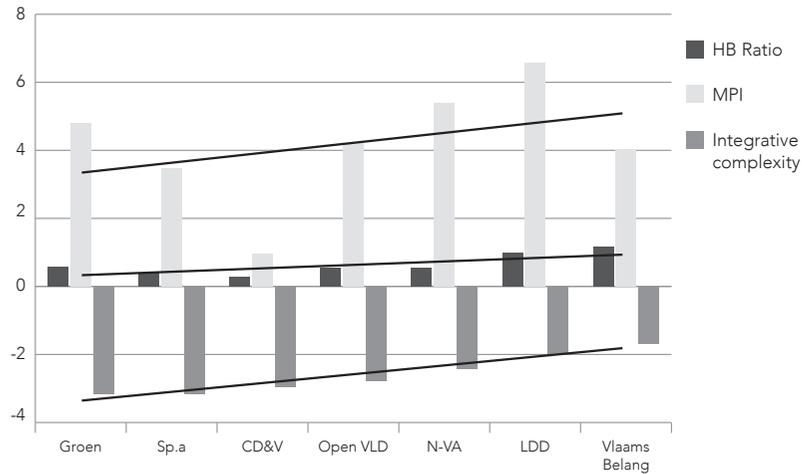
'Ideological' differences

Chapter 3 concluded that ideological differences could be detected through rhetorical use of language. Most of the empirical studies in this dissertation support this conclusion to a great extent, as we have found many significant differences on the use of rhetorical variables between political parties. For instance, the study in Chapter 5 confirmed the hypothesis that levels of complexity significantly differ between different political elites (with the one populist politician standing out the most). We also acknowledged that rhetoric plays an important role in the process of simplification. In the studies on integrative complexity and hyperbole (Chapter 4, 5 and 8) we expected that political parties at the endings of the so-called political spectrum would show significantly higher degrees of hyperbole use and lower levels of integrative complexity than political parties situated in the centre, and additionally, that political parties that can be classified as 'populist', 'extremist' or 'radical right', show significantly deviant hyperbole use and would be less complex compared to the 'mainstream' parties, which will be revealed in a higher degree of hyperbole use and in more negative values, and lower levels of integrative complexity. Noticeably, although centre parties indeed generally show lower degrees of hyperbole frequency in their discourse, there is no real quantitatively significant difference between most political parties when it comes to hyperbole frequency and negative or positive evaluation. However, as predicted, particular parties at the right-end of the political spectrum show clear significant deviant results, as we will pursue later in greater depth.

When the three main variables that are included in this dissertation – metaphor, hyperbole and integrative complexity – are analysed all for one specific context, we can describe an apparent trend that supports the assumption that was stated earlier. Figure 9.1 below shows the three variables derived from different empirical studies in this dissertation (i.e. Chapter 3 for the MPI and I.C. scores, and Chapter 4 for the HB-ratio scores). Although the bars in the graphs also show that there is eminent variance in the use of the different variables per political party, the trend lines indicate that the general shift in rhetoric – i.e. using more metaphor and hyperbole and being less complex in political communication – moves from left to right in the political spectrum. This applies above all for the level of complexity and to a great extent to the use of hyperbole. The most deviant scores on all of the variables, both in the cases of Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands, are constantly attributed to the same political parties: the political

parties *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) in the Netherlands, as well as *Libertair, Direct, Democratisch* (LDD) and *Vlaams Belang* (VB) in Flanders. These parties that are usually labelled as populist and/or radical right parties are therefore interesting cases to examine in greater detail.

Figure 9.1: The rhetorical variables of hyperbole, metaphor and integrative complexity differentiated among political parties in Flanders (Belgium) (derived from Chapter 3 and Chapter 4)



Populism as defining factor

Populist movements appear to make a (at least temporary) revival throughout almost every country in Europe and many countries worldwide in recent years. From a scientific point of view it is challenging to examine (the different sides of) this ambiguous phenomenon. The ‘problem’ of decreeing on one universal understanding is above all caused by the changing, volatile and holistic character of this phenomenon. Populism can be subscribed to all different kinds of ideologies and political movements from left to right and conservative to progressive. Additionally, populism is *chameleonic* in character: it adapts itself to changing circumstances, it takes different forms and it emphasizes different values, depending on the specific time and place (Taggart, 2000). Besides, the identity and specification of what populism is depends on the difference in understanding of what ‘populism’ represents in a specific context. In

theoretical research, populism has been distinguished either as an individual ideology, a mobilization strategy and a communication style (or rhetoric) or, more likely, as a combination of the three (in e.g. Ionescu and Gellner, 1970; Abts, 2004; Laclau, 2005). For a better understanding of the phenomenon of populism one should not regard each dimension separately, but actually take all three sides collectively and complementarily into account: the populist ideology, the strategy and the rhetoric.

Populism as ideology

In Chapter 6 we explored the concept of populism as ideology more extensively, and tried to make an examination of the presence of populism in the political contexts of Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands, as two specific cases in the Western European emergence of (often) similar populist parties. In this study we made an attempt to clarify the ambiguity and vagueness that surrounds the understanding of populism to a certain extent. Although it may be difficult to define ‘populism’, there is agreement on some recurring principles that yield in almost every definition of the populist ideal. The basic concepts of populist ideology are (the will of) ‘the people’, the central role of democracy and the sovereign state, and the importance of (resisting) the counterpart of the people; ‘the elite’ (see e.g. Taggart, 2000). An extensive elaboration on the populist ideology made clear that there is indeed a moralistic populist ideology, which can be summarized as (I) an idealized image of the people’s democracy, (II) the proposition that ‘the people’ is abandoned or even betrayed by the political establishment, and (III) that this basic principle must be restored or regained (Abts, 2004).

Additionally, the study in Chapter 6 examined populism in two political cases: the context of Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands. Both Belgium and the Netherlands face political fluctuating times, in which traditional electoral loyalty is volatile and rare, whereas new, plain and radical parties such as the Flemish-nationalist party N-VA (Belgium) and the populist party PVV (the Netherlands) take over electoral successes. We made an ideological classification of the different political parties not only in both the Flemish and Dutch contexts (Figure 6.2), but also in comparison to other populist(-like) parties in Western Europe (Figure 6.3). It was concluded that, ideologically speaking, populism in Western Europe – Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands included – is located almost exclusively in the conservative, authoritarian, right wing quadrant, often even closely to fascist-like principles.

The rhetoric of populism

In the last chapters we examined the populist rhetoric on the basis of the case of Dutch politician Geert Wilders and his populist party *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV). It is regularly argued that style and content go well together in the politics of Geert Wilders and his PVV-colleagues. Due to his strong statements, his controversial attitude and aberrant political style Wilders has changed the political landscape in the Netherlands in the last decade. In the empirical case study of Chapter 7, an examination was made of both the content and style of the Dutch politician, based on the themes that appear in Wilders' political policy, and the use of metaphor in his political language. The results in this study showed in the first place that classic right-extreme themes, such as security, immigration, nationalism and anti-politics, play an important role in the public communication by Wilders (measured in press releases, opinion pieces and columns). Furthermore, the methodology of the Metaphor Power Index (e.g. De Landtsheer, 2015) traced the power of the use of this stylistic element. We concluded that Wilders practices a 'metaphoric style', with a clear powerful use of metaphor (MPI = 8.642), both in frequency of use as intensity and content. Especially the metaphors that are connected to classic right-extreme themes ("Nationalism", "Security", "Immigration") have a strong impact. This metaphor analysis gave us a picture of the political rhetorical style of populists, but as argued, the metaphor is only one indicator in a series of different style features. Therefore, it has been interesting to examine also other rhetorical devices, such as the use of exaggeration, and other cognitive style elements of Wilders such as the level of complexity of his rhetoric.

In Chapter 5 it was already revealed that the rhetoric of Geert Wilders, compared to the other party leaders in the Dutch parliament, deviates in different ways. The leader of the PVV reaches a significant low level of complexity, with barely traces of differentiation (let alone signs of integration) in his political rhetoric. Additionally, with a $HB\text{-}ratio_{Wilders} = 3.75$ rhetorical exaggeration per hundred words, Wilders is also the most hyperbolic in his language compared to the other party leaders and any other measured variable. Chapter 8 has been a deepening into the use of hyperbole by the populist party PVV (and its party leader Geert Wilders) compared to other parties in the context of the Dutch parliamentary debates. Again we found, as expected, a significant difference between the politicians of the PVV (with $HB\text{-}ratio_{PVV} = 2.43$) and all other parties (average of $HB\text{-}ratio = 1.44$). Figure 8.1 clearly demonstrated the deviance of the

PVV compared to the other parties. The rhetorical exaggeration of the PVV was also found to be the most negative in HB-value. Interestingly, the opposing, a-political pose that seems to fit the populist party is especially emphasized due to the fact that the only time that the PVV's hyperbolic language significantly declined was during the period that the party was a non-official partner of the (minority) government (see Figure 8.2).

These results are comparable to the findings of the analysis of hyperbole in the political language in the Flemish case in Chapter 4. The populist radical parties LDD and *Vlaams Belang* (VB) achieved not only the highest level of hyperbole use, but they also express a more 'populist' form of exaggeration, by regularly referring to the general or common sense of the mass (e.g. 'we all know that...') and a strong oppositional standpoint against the political elite (e.g. 'again nothing was accomplished'), more than other parties in the political spectrum. Especially the extreme right party VB showed a very deviant and peculiar hyperbole use, which was also the case with the other variables of metaphor power and integrative complexity measured in Chapter 3, compared to the other Flemish political parties, but also similar to the hyperbolic language of PVV.

There is a remarkable deviance in the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical tool by these radical and populist parties compared to all other parties. It was concluded that hyperbole is an effective way to stress an opinion and claim emphasis to a subject. It appears to be an effective way of provoking and appealing to apparent negative deeds and decisions by the political authorities. Moreover, the use of certain rhetorical characteristics, such as the figures of speech of metaphor and hyperbole, and the cognitive simplification of reasoning, seem to be inextricably bound up with the language of these populist politicians. We conclude from our case studies that the language of the PVV in the Dutch parliament debates, and its party leader Geert Wilders in particular, seems almost hyperbolic and simplistic in nature, and its style can be described as highly original, very forceful, and primarily rhetorical-oriented, with the continuous reference to the main pillar of the populist ideology: the people (illustrated by the following quote).

"It is not possible anymore to estimate the material damage of that and the damage in terms of suffer, anxiety and inconvenience, it's not possible to calculate or describe it. The *people* do not want this. The *people* don't want to get mugged by addicts, the *people* don't want continuous annoyance in their streets and neighbourhoods. *People* don't want insane traffic behaviour by drugs runners on our highways. *People* don't want coffee shops [smart shops] in

the near presence of their children. *People* don't want any loitering and troubling drugs-users on their doorways. *People* don't want special care for addicts in their living environment. Enough is enough! Thirty years policy of tolerance has been thirty years of misery." (Raymond de Roon, PVV, March 6, 2008)

Coming to an overall conclusion

Making politics bigger, better and simpler?

Can we, eventually, answer the question whether there is actually a rhetorical strategy to make politics bigger, better and simpler? There are without question rhetorical tools that can be used in order to affect the shape and impact of language. We measured the use of metaphor that connects different spheres into a new meaning, and makes language more diverse and colourful, the use of hyperbole that intensifies elements in text and speech in order to have a bigger impact, and the level of integrative complexity that marks the degree of simplification in reasoning. Throughout the various studies we expected that variables such as time, role and ideology are defining factors for differences in rhetoric in political language. It was revealed that politicians of different political parties make use of these rhetorical variables in order to respond to a certain (emotive) need, e.g. in times of crisis or crisis-like circumstances such as elections, but also as part of their daily political routine in parliament. When it comes to the use of metaphor, hyperbole and the level of complexity, opposition parties constantly use significant higher degrees of rhetoric-oriented communication than their political opponents who are linked to the incumbent government. They also easily shift in the degree of rhetorical language when roles are being changed in the course of the years in parliament. Considering the premise that (intentionally) using rhetorical figures in political language can serve a strategic, persuasive purpose, it was expected that how, when and to what extent rhetorical variables occur in the political discourse depend on certain 'conditions'. The power of many rhetorical figures lies in the fact that figurative language appeals rather easily to existing emotions, and it can evoke new emotions. These emotions work in two ways: they either reassure one or rather do the opposite, such as provoking strong negative feelings (e.g. anxiety, anger or panic) (De Landtsheer, 2006, 2009). Depending on the (perceived) level of social instability, political parties can

benefit from the use of metaphorical, hyperbolic and simplistic language as part of their political communication.

Within the complicated political world of arguing, decision-making and leadership, political elites behave, above all, in a way that is more or less expected from them. Logically, governing parties will benefit from stability and moderate rhetoric, because they obtain relief in stable circumstances in which they can steadily execute their policy, and they would therefore aim at reassurance rather than triggering feelings such as anxiety or anger. Oppositional parties in contrast, could benefit from emphasizing (perceived) dis- or malfunctioned governing, unhandled problems in society, and (personal) failures of the rulers – e.g. the Prime-Minister and the (other) cabinet members. Therefore, in order to emphasize this kind of 'miscarriage', the opposition will rather try to change the status quo by aiming for instability, insecurity and crisis, and thus aim to increase the psychological stress by conceiving threats and risks, e.g. by exaggeration (i.e. overstatement) of these 'shortcomings', by powerful imagery to shift or attract attention, by zero-sum judgments, and by highly emotive 'black-and-white'-rhetoric.

But probably more revealing are the 'ideological differences' that can be detected in the (differences of) rhetoric that political parties express. It became clear from the first empirical study that a sort of 'crisis language' has become commonplace for certain political parties (i.e. their political leaders), not only in times of real political crisis but also in much more steady circumstances. On the one hand, this could be the result of changes in political communication style as a whole. It is often argued that contemporary politics increasingly consists of sound bites, one-liners and personalized positions, in which party leaders have become the overall public figures of the political parties that seek for attention of the audience in a competitive political arena (Busby, 2009). Crisis communication seems to fit this modern competitive, attention-seeking political habit. However, on the other hand, the study on crisis communication indicated particular significant 'ideological' variation, which was later confirmed by other chapters in this dissertation, also outside crisis situations and/or when the circumstances did not specifically 'ask' for rhetoric-oriented language. Based on previous research we found that different political parties show significantly different degrees of rhetorical language in their average day political routine. More specific, we discovered significant

differences in communication style between populist radical right politicians and more ‘mainstream’ political parties.

Derived from the focus on the political cases in both Flanders and the Netherlands that can be classified as ‘populist parties,’ i.e. the PVV, LDD and VB, it is shown that these parties express a significantly deviant rhetoric. Especially the case of Geert Wilders and his part PVV gives us a good insight into the rhetoric of contemporary populism in Western European societies. This dissertation concludes from three empirical case studies (in Chapters 5, 7 and 8) that populism and a radical rhetorical style are inseparable. The political rhetorical style that Wilders (and the PVV) handles is not only highly metaphorical and hyperbolic, but also significantly more simplistic in arguing. The same result was also already obtained for the extreme right VB in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Final concluding thoughts

The voice of the people

Why is the rhetoric of populist leaders so different from other politicians? “[O]ften populist style is confused with a style that simply seeks to be popular – to appeal to a wide range of people”, but this is both an incomplete and inaccurate use of the term (Taggart, 2000, p. 5). Surely, populist style is at least partly ideologically driven. In the general populist vision, the established politicians are power-hungry and corrupt politicians who have lost all connection to the ‘common man’: they do not care about ‘the people’ but only serve their own interests. The populist party, thus in essence anti-political, offers resistance and ‘fights from within’ against the corrupting elite, so that politics will be given back to the people once again (Canovan, 2004). Populist ideology is however, as I have argued, open for a lot of criticism. The lack of fixed core programmatic ideas makes that the populist ideology is seen as a thin-centred version of an ideology (Canovan, 2002). Besides, substantively it is mainly based on a mythical and unreal conception of society and politics (Betz, 1994, Taggart, 2000, Mudde, 2004).

Could it be that in this understanding of the populist ideology, is it also a populist *strategy* that is distinctively reflected? Populists consider themselves the proclaimers of

the ‘absolute truth’ because they speak ‘for or on behalf of the people’ (Zijderveld, 2009). The ‘voice of the people,’ in its turn, is thus embodied by a populist leader who is the representative of the common sense, regarded as a critical ‘popular’ will that is opposing the system, and who speaks the language of the common man. Through charismatic leadership’ the underlying political message is (ought to be) made rhetorical-oriented, e.g. more direct, personalized, dramatic and emotive. It can be argued that the populist preposition of “representing the interests of the people” is in essence a meaningless idea, merely a communicative expression that part of the electorate is gratefully willing to adapt. The populist promise is certainly tempting for many people, but it also acknowledges that populism depends largely on charismatic leadership and rhetoric.

But at the same time, it is also part of the ‘role’ of a politician who claims or is held to be populist. Populist rhetoric anticipates on the populist idea of ‘by and for the common man,’ therefore the populist language is permitted, even expected, to be simplistic, straightforward, and ‘anti-political.’ Moreover, it has been verified in this dissertation that several rhetorical ‘tools’ are among the most common strategies used by populists and extremists with the aim of persuading voters. The powerful emotive and figurative discourse, the exaggerations, the absence of doubt and nuance, and the lack of offering possible solutions, are all strongly connected to the radical rhetorical style that is often attributed to the successful but also criticised populist movements. In (contemporary) times of crisis, whereas many people tend to be politically disoriented, alienated and anxious about economic and cultural circumstances, it is probably a very appealing strategy to make politics look ‘bigger, better and simpler.’ And undeniable, these populist party leaders seem to offer straightforward, feasible and attractive solutions for various external and internal ‘threats,’ such as the European Union, the incumbent elite, and immigrants, that are being associated with these economic and cultural crises. But is it not above all only ‘empty’ rhetoric?

The ‘dangers’ of (populist) rhetoric?

In the introduction I already argued that rhetoric is often perceived pejoratively rather than as a virtue. The main reason for this is the relatively thin line between rhetoric, the art of using language to persuade, and demagoguery. When (political/opinion) leaders systematically use ‘false’ rhetoric, popular desires and prejudices as means to mislead the

mass, then it is called demagogueryⁱⁱ. Demagogues often proclaim half-truths, semblances of truths, fake argumentation and misconception, in order to mislead the people, i.e. to let them draw false conclusion, or even to incite the mass.

But also populism and demagoguery are more than once mentioned in one and the same breath (Mény and Surel, 2002b; Panizza, 2005; Stanley, 2008). Populist rhetoric is often accused of relying on popular fallacies that appeal to ‘common sense’ or ‘apparent logic’ of the people. When political leaders adjust their language to meet norms, values, and traditions of their audience, their rhetoric can be consider impressive. The impressive and rhetorical language of the populist responds perfectly well to present latent emotions, such as ‘gut feelings’, vague existing desires and needs, and general discomfort (Billig, 2003). Populist impressive rhetoric can be linked to demagoguery, because of the implicit exclusive concern for pleasing the audience instead of expressing a political idea (Windt and Ingold, 1987, 1992). The lack of a clear core program consequently allows populist standpoints to be time-specific, changeable and volatile. As I argued, the boundary between idealistic leadership and a Machiavellian principle that allows the leader to says ‘whatever the people want to hear’ for his/her own benefit, is therefore sometimes difficult to define. Indeed, we have seen throughout the empirical studies, “[c]omplex issues [are] often reduced to simple answers, and blatant slogans and vague metaphors made wide interpretations and identification possible.” (Wodak, 2003, p. 133).

That is probably why the label ‘populist’ is generally used mostly in a negative way, as a pejorative, and often as a denigration of statements or people. Populism has been characterized, for example, as a reactive pathologic form of politics, as pseudo-democratic, appealing to ‘the gut feeling’ of people, sloganesque, simplistic, demagogic or opportunistic “with the aim of (quickly) pleasing the people/voters – and so ‘buying’ their support” (Mudde, 2004, p. 542). According to Zijderfeld (2009) populism is like an “oil slick” floating on “shimmering emotions of discomfort, uncertainty, and often resentment and the accentuation of (and living on) dissatisfaction, rancour, feelings of hate”ⁱⁱⁱ. Not surprisingly, populist politicians have rarely labelled themselves ‘populists,’ and rejected the classification by others as such (Canovan, 1981; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). However, this seems to change in recent years, since more and more politicians proudly carry the populist banner. It has become that strategy – the presupposed expression of the voice of the people, charismatic leadership, opportunistic

and volatile ideological standpoints, and above all the clear and univocal rhetoric – that has made many populist parties across Western Europe more and more popular in recent years, at to the point that many populist openly admit their populism. It explains unequivocally, as I argued, why it is of such an importance to study populism and its attached rhetoric.

“My fraction does not need any scientific research (...) to draw this conclusion. This conclusion is evident; facts of common knowledge don’t require proof.” (Raymond de Roon, PVV, March 6, 2008)

NOTES

- i Another rhetorical figure that is not discussed here, but will easily be linked to the idea of integrative complexity, is oversimplification which is in fact a fallacy of a single (or questionable) cause, because a one-sided, false dilemma occurs (it is either A or B).
- ii See e.g. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/demagogue>
- iii Original quotation in Dutch: "Populisme is als een olievlek die drijft op zinderende emoties van onbehagen, onzekerheid en vaak ook rancune en het aanscherpen van onvrede, rancune, haatgevoelens en erop teren" (Zijderveld, 2009)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium)

Table A.1: Major political parties and their ideological position in parliament in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) (source: own design)

Party	Full name (Dutch)	English name	Ideological positioning ^a
The Netherlands			
CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christian Democratic Appeal	Centre-right
D'66 (D66)	Democraten '66	Democrats 66	Centre
GroenLinks (GL)	-	Green Left	Left
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid	Labour Party	Centre-left
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom	Radical-right
SP	Socialistische Partij	Socialist Party	Radical-left
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	Centre-right

Flanders (Belgium)

CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams	Christian Democratic Flemish	Centre-right
Groen ^b	-	Green	Left
LDD ^c	Libertair, Direct, Democratisch	Libertarian, Direct, Democratic	Radical-right
N-VA ^d	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	New-Flemish Alliance	Right
Open VLD ^e	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Centre-right
Sp.a ^f	Socialistische Partij Anders	Socialist Party Different	Centre-left
Vlaams Belang (VB) ^g	-	Flemish Interest	Radical-right

^a The ideological positioning is a rough classification based on the parties' own positioning (on e.g. their websites) and the positional division (from an ideological left-right view) in the actual parliaments. In Chapter 6 we elaborate more extensively on the ideological classification of political parties in both the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium).

^b Formerly known as Groen!

^c Formerly known as Lijst DeDecker

^d N-VA formed an alliance (known as 'cartel') with CD&V between 2004 and 2008

^e Formerly known as VLD

^f Formerly known as Sp.a-Spirit (as part of an alliance between Sp.a and Spirit between 2002-2008)

^g Formerly known as Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block)

APPENDIX B: ABBREVIATIONS

List of abbreviations

B – Belgium	MP ^a – Member of Parliament
BHV (B-H-V) – Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde	MPI (MP ^a) – Metaphor Power Index
BNP – <i>British National Party</i>	NL – Netherlands
CCC (index) – Crisis Communication Combination (Index)	N-VA (NVA) – <i>Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie</i>
CDA – <i>Christen-Democratisch Appèl</i>	OPEN VLD – see VLD
CD&V – <i>Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams</i>	PDL – <i>Popolo della Libertá</i>
CU – <i>ChristenUnie</i>	PDS – <i>Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus</i>
D66 (D'66) – <i>Democraten '66</i>	PS – <i>Perussuomalaiset</i>
DF – <i>Dansk Folkeparti</i>	PvdA (PVDA) – <i>Partij van de Arbeid</i>
DHL – Dalsey, Hillblom and Lynn	PvdD – <i>Partij voor de Dieren</i>
EU – European Union	PVV – <i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i>
FF - <i>Fianna Fall</i>	SD – <i>Sverigedemokraterna</i>
FrP – <i>Fremskrittspartiet</i>	SGP – <i>Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij</i>
FN – <i>Front National</i>	SP – <i>Socialistische Partij</i>
FPÖ – <i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i>	Sp.a – <i>Socialistische Partij Anders</i>
GAL – <i>Green/Alternative/Libertarian</i>	SVP/UDC – <i>Schweizerische Volkspartei/ Union Démocratique du Centre</i>
GL – <i>Groenlinks</i>	TAN – <i>Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalistic</i>
HB – <i>Hyperbole</i>	UK – <i>United Kingdom</i>
IC (I.C.) – <i>Integrative Complexity</i>	UKIP – <i>United Kingdom Independence Party</i>
LDD – <i>Libertair, Direct, Democratisch</i> (formerly known as Lijst Dedecker)	U.S. – <i>United States</i>
LN – <i>Lega Nord</i>	VB – <i>Vlaams Belang</i>
MC(I) – <i>Metaphor Content (Index)</i>	VLD – <i>Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten</i>
MF(I) – <i>Metaphor Frequency (Index)</i>	VVD – <i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i>
MI(I) – <i>Metaphor Intensity (Index)</i>	

APPENDIX C: CODING INSTRUCTIONS AND SCHEMES

Metaphor Power

Coding instructions (in Dutch)

1. Wat is een metafoor?

Een metafoor is een uitdrukking die vreemd is aan de context. Een statement over een politiek of economisch onderwerp wordt geformuleerd in de bewoordingen van een totaal ander onderwerp als dagelijks leven, natuur, techniek, onheil, sport of ziekte. Elke metafoor wordt apart geteld, wordt dezelfde metafoor meermaals gebruikt in dezelfde tekst, dan wordt zij iedere keer geteld.

2. Wat is de intensiteit van de metafoor?

Elke metafoor wordt in de eerste plaats onderverdeeld volgens de sterkte van de metafoor zelf: zwak (z), neutraal (n) en sterk (s). De sterkte van een metafoor hangt af van hoe hard je nog nadent over de letterlijke betekenis van een metafoor. Het gaat hier over de “referentiesterkte”. Bij een sterke metafoor is er een sterke verwijzing en is het daarbij ook een originele metafoor. Bij een neutrale metafoor is er een sterke verwijzing maar omdat de metafoor zeer vaak gebruikt wordt, is zij niet meer origineel. Bijvoorbeeld “België is ziek”: er is een sterke verwijzing naar ziekte maar deze metafoor wordt vaak gebruikt. “De maatregelen worden in de koelkast geplaatst” is een neutrale metafoor: zij wordt vaak gebruikt maar tegelijk is er wel nog een zeer sterke verwijzing; je denkt meteen aan een ijskast. Bij een zwakke metafoor is er nog slechts een zwakke connotatie met de letterlijke betekenis, en is de metafoor ook niet meer origineel. Het zijn platgereden, banale metaforen, als bijv. “We zijn op de goede weg”.

3. Wat is de inhoud van de metafoor?

Aan de hand van zes inhoudscategorieën worden metaforen gerangschikt van zwak naar sterk effect. Als er elementen aanwezig zijn van meerdere inhoudscategorieën wordt gekozen voor de categorie die het beste de connotatie weergeeft die de metafoor oplevert. Bijv. “Griekenland en Dexia: lekkende boten in permanente storm”. Hoewel er elementen aanwezig zijn van alledaagsheid (lekkende boten) van vervoer (boten) en van natuur (storm) is de connotatie van onheil dominant (lekkende boten in een permanente storm zullen naar alle waarschijnlijkheid vergaan).

1. *Popular* or everyday-life metaphors (P). These metaphors serve the basic function of making the abstract tangible and comprehensible to a large audience (e.g. Zinken, 2004). For example: “By giving Islam equal space the VVD puts the Dutch identity on sale” (press release by Wilders ‘VVD leest voor uit dagboek Ella Vogelaar’ in *De Telegraaf*, October 8, 2008)
2. *Nature* metaphors (N). This kind of metaphor works in two ways. The natural order can be confirmed and lead to the suggestion of citizen’s control over the environment, but it can also express the idea of lack of control. In references to flora and fauna we witness both wild and domestic animals for instance (e.g. Zinken, 2004). Example: “a new *wave* of threat” (interview of Wilders, ‘Straks komt er een steen van links’, *Nederlands Dagblad*, March 23, 2007).
3. *Technical*, navigation, construction, political and other sophisticated metaphors (T). This imagery has also an ambivalent character. It allows politicians to show multiple dimensions of complex problems. Metaphors of architecture advance the discussion, whereas mechanical metaphors usually expose people’s lack of control (e.g. Zinken, 2004; Chilton and Ilyin, 1993; Schöffner, 1993). Example: “let us never bring in the Turkish *Trojan Horse*” (interview of Wilders ‘Tien keer nee tegen Turkije’, *De Volkskrant*, November 17, 2009)
4. *Violence* and disaster metaphors (V). This category refers to negative emotions, such as anxiety, despair and aggression. However, it allows citizens to be in control to some extent (e.g. Zinken, 2004). Example: “those who refuse to stop the Islamic *invasion* of the Netherlands” (opinion piece by Wilders ‘Genoeg is genoeg: verbied de Koran’, *De Volkskrant*, August 8, 2007)

5. *Drama*, sports, film, theatre, opera, history, bible and games metaphors (D). Sports and games are about the drama of ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ and these metaphors appeal to many people, because of their perceived harmlessness and the possibility to escape reality for a while. However, the imagery provides a very unrealistic image of reality, which makes them very powerful (e.g. Zinken, 2004). Example: “The Netherlands is the big *loser*” (opinion piece by Wilders ‘Nederland moet onafhankelijk blijven’, *De Volkskrant*, February 15, 2005).
6. *Body*, disease, medical and death metaphors (B). This last category is attributed the highest power. It concerns very emotional metaphors that leave the suggestion that every control is lost, and that there is a fundamental need for a ‘doctor’ who can restore or cure the current situation (e.g. Gregg, 2004; Musolff, 2007). Examples: “the *recovery* of the Dutch culture has been a concern of many of you” (column by Wilders ‘Schieten met scherp’ on website *Geenstijl.nl*, May 29, 2007) or “the *retarded* Islamic culture” (interview of Wilders in *Revu*, February 10, 2010).

Onder de zes inhoudscategorieën van metaforen met als voorbeelden alle metaforen uit het artikel van De Morgen (14-11-2012, p.17) getiteld “Griekenland en Dexia: lekkende boten in permanente storm”

Table C.1: Metaphor content categories (MC) with explanation and examples

Inhoudscategorie	Symbool	Uitleg	Voorbeelden (in tekst)
Populaire metafoeren: Metafoeren over het dagelijkse leven, de maaltijd, de familie, de tuin, dagdagelijkse spreekwoorden.	P	Weinig gebruikte moeilijke gezegden, sterke citaten uit de bijbel, of zeer geraffineerde culinaire bereidingen, horen niet thuis in deze categorie maar in die van sport, spel en drama.	"Bij Dexia zit de financiering helemaal <i>scheef</i> "; " <i>staat geen enkele overheid te springen</i> "; "De overheden moeten <i>onderweg</i> beslissen over de grootte van de buffers". "welke koers ga je varen?" ; "Dexia of Griekenland <i>laten zinken</i> " (als een zinkend schip); " <i>oplapwerk</i> " "dat de <i>gehavende boten drijvende houdt</i> "; "om de <i>Griekse rommel</i> voor enige tijd <i>uit de weg te ruimen</i> "; "vroeg of laat krijgen de politici de <i>rommel weer voor hun voeten</i> "; " <i>met vers geld - over de brug komt</i> " (dit zijn twee metafoeren: met geld over de brug komen + vers geld); Ze zullen " <i>de lastigste knopen</i> van de Griekse redding pas op 20 november <i>doorhakken</i> "; "Zoals in het dossier-Dexia de Franse en Belgische staat <i>touwtrekken</i> "; " <i>een offer</i> van de publieke schuldeisers " (een offer brengen); "probleembeleggingen <i>breed uitgesmeerd over de tijd</i> kan afbouwen"; " <i>zware offers</i> moeten vragen van zijn bevolking"; "Beide dossiers <i>zijn innig met elkaar verbonden</i> "; "dan keldert Dexia's <i>loodzware obligatieportefeuille</i> " (twee metafoeren uit verschillende categorieën, zie ook onheil); " <i>twee lekkende boten</i> "; " <i>de boot laten zinken</i> geen optie is".
Natuurmetafoeren: Over fauna, flora en natuur	N	Bevatten rationale elementen en de suggestie dat burgers de controle hebben over het milieu, of het milieu gedraagt zich vrij normaal, zoals verwacht.	"beleidsmakers moeten hopen dat <i>de zon weer gaat schijnen</i> ", " <i>een financiële storm die maar niet gaat liggen</i> ";
Politieke, intellectuele en technologische metafoeren: Gebruikt om complexe politieke processen te simplificeren. Verwijzen bijv. naar technische middelen, vervoer, werktuigen, de bouw, zijn moeilijk/geraffineerd	T	De mens heeft de controle over zijn omgeving. Deze metafoeren vatten soms het brondomein en politiek onderwerp in één woord of een korte woordgroep (samen-trekking).	"de <i>politieke kalender</i> "; " <i>Zonder de in gang gezette kapitaalverhoging</i> " (doet denken aan motor, auto); " <i>beide lekkende boten maar op zee zien te repareren</i> ". "Niemand betwist dat zowel Dexia als Griekenland <i>structurele constructiefouten</i> bevat". " <i>Vaar je dicht tegen de wind of met de wind in de rug?</i> Dat is een politieke keuze"; " <i>probleembeleggingen</i> breed uitgesmeerd over de tijd ... <i>afbouwen</i> " (twee metafoeren uit verschillende categorieën).
Onheilmetafoeren: Hebben allemaal een expressie van agressie, depressie en wanhoop gemeen door verwijzing naar rampen, geweld en onheil in het algemeen.	O	De mens heeft (grotendeels) de controle verloren.	"Als de eurocrisis <i>ontaat in een uitslaande brand</i> " (twee metafoeren van verschillende categorieën; zie ook lichaam); "dan <i>keldert</i> Dexia's <i>loodzware obligatieportefeuille</i> " (twee metafoeren uit verschillende categorieën).
Sport-, games-, en dramametafoeren: Er wordt bijv. verwezen naar film, opera, ballet, de bijbel, de geschiedenis (bijv. door Latijnse spreuken naar de Romeinen, of door Engelse oorlogstaal naar de tweede Wereldoorlog), voetbal, boksen, spelletjes.	S	Bevatten kracht door hun populariteit. De onechte wereldvisie van het publieke leven maakt deze categorie effectief.	" <i>financiële drama's</i> "; " <i>Het blikje voortdurend verder schoppen</i> " (doet denken aan spel), "een spelletje niet-met-de-ogen-knippen"; "Geen happy end" (doet denken aan film); "zal in elk scenario".
Lichaams-, ziekte-, medische- en doodmetafoeren	B	Metafoeren met een emotieve kracht omdat ze gerelateerd zijn aan het lichaam of aan ziekte/gezondheid/medicatie	"Net als Dexia zal Griekenland de komende tien jaar niet op eigen benen kunnen staan"; "De Europese Centrale Bank <i>houdt</i> zowel Dexia als Griekenland <i>tijdelijk overeind via liquiditeitslijnen</i> " (connotatie aan infuus); " <i>Valt Dexia om, dan vallen ook zijn tegenpartijen om</i> " (dit zijn twee metafoeren); "Als de eurocrisis <i>ontaat in een uitslaande brand</i> " (twee metafoeren van verschillende categorieën).

Table C.2: Coding sheet metaphors

Nr.	Actor	Party	Date	N Words	N Meta	z	n	s	P	N	T	O	S	L

Hyperbole

Coding instructions (in Dutch)

De volgende tekst bevat naast letterlijke uitspraken (waarschijnlijk) ook retorische overdrijvingen (of hyperbolen). In onderstaande codeertabel zie je ten eerste elke alinea uit de te analyseren tekst. Daarnaast staan verschillende criteria die je helpen bij het detecteren van hyperbolen. Om te kunnen spreken van een hyperbool moet aan alle criteria worden voldaan, waarbij uiteraard het eerste criterium onontbeerlijk is. Een uitspraak die alleen onder het eerste criterium te plaatsen valt, beschouwen we niet als een hyperbool. Helemaal rechts in de tabel zie je dat elke hyperbool ook gecategoriseerd moet worden met een waarde: negatief, neutraal of positief.

Detectie

In een eerste stap moet simpelweg gekeken worden of een opmerking overdreven is. Alles wat afwijkt van het neutrale karakter van een opmerking en de uitspraak kracht bijzet, kan een overdrijving zijn. Dit is meestal figuurlijk bedoeld, waardoor een hyperbool ook de vorm van bijvoorbeeld een metafoor kan aannemen. De volgende criteria bepalen of er sprake is van een hyperbool of niet:

1. Een woord, zin of alinea bevat (ten minste één) retorisch figuurlijke zegswijze waarin de realiteit (een bewering of statement, een argument, een voorbeeld) in een overdreven of uitvergrootte vorm wordt voorgesteld. De overdrijving wordt gedaan door (minimaal één van) de volgende taalkundige kenmerken:

- a. *Extreme Case Formulation* (keywords die duiden op een figuurlijke uitvergroting, zie schema) of aanvullende syntactische ondersteuning, en/of;
 - b. Metaforische en/of figuratieve overdrijving (bijvoorbeeld in hardere bewoording omschreven)
2. Er moet als bij definitie sprake zijn van een extremititeit (een uiterste) of zekere vergroting van iets dat ook neutra(a)(ler) gesteld kan worden. Kenmerken hiervan zijn:
 - a. De stelling is vreemd ten opzichte van de context (letterlijk genomen past het niet, is het niet op zijn plaats of opmerkelijk)
 - b. De stelling is (letterlijk genomen) onwaarschijnlijk, onmogelijk of simpelweg niet waar
 3. De stelling is wel realistisch bedoeld, dat wil zeggen dat er geen sprake is (grappig bedoelde) nonsens of flauwekul, absurdisme, of opzettelijke leugens

Table C.3: Coding sheet and checklist for coding a singular hyperbole in phrase/sentence

Sample	Source code:	
	Number of words:	
	Party:	
	Actor:	
Hyperbole?		Neutral/positive/negative*
Checklist (per hyperbole)	Criteria	Present?
1a	Extreme formulation	
	Syntactic support	
1b	Metaphorical/figurative	
2	Enlargement or extremity	
2a	Disjunction w/ context	
2b	Counterfactual/impossible/unlikely	
3	Meaningful utterance	

* Omcirkel wat van toepassing is

Categorisering

Om hyperbolen te bestempelen als negatief of positief hoeft de lezer enkel naar de context te kijken.

1. **Positieve hyperbool:** deze drukt bewondering, goedkeuring of lof van de spreker uit.
2. **Negatieve hyperbool:** deze ventileert afkeur, kritiek of veroordeling van de spreker.
3. In alle andere gevallen is er sprake van een **neutrale hyperbool**.

Table C.4: Coding sheet hyperbole per tekst sample (incl. example)

Text sample	N words	N HB	H+	H-	HB-ratio	HB-value
2011.16.03	839	15	2	8	1.79	1.4

N words = number of words in sample; N HB = number of hyperboles in sample
 $H+$ = number of positive hyperboles; $H-$ = number of negative hyperboles
 HB -ratio = $(N \text{ HB} / N \text{ words}) \times 100$ (number of hyperboles per 100 words)
 HB -value = $(H- - H+) / N \text{ HB} + 1$ (value of hyperbolic evaluation from 0 (positive) to 2 (negative))

Integrative Complexity

Coding instructions (in Dutch)

Principes van scores:

- Afzonderlijke ideeën/opvattingen worden samengenomen als codeerbare eenheden (meestal per paragraaf)
- oplopende benadering van codering (codering moet aan alle eerdere scores voldoen om een hogere score te krijgen)

- codering gaat bovenal om structuur en niet om inhoud van de tekst
- complexer \neq beter of juist
- vermijd 'coder bias' ten alle kosten (persoonlijke opvatting, waarden, etc. Dienen geen rol te spelen)

Table C.5: Integrative complexity scores explained

Score	Dimension	In short	Indicators	Keywords
1	Geen differentiatie / geen integratie	Eenzijdige wereldvisie, absoluutheden, eendimensionaal en simpel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Categorisering (hokjes denken) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Categorische afwijzing van (andere) perspectieven of dimensies b. Opzetten van een 'stroman' (pseudo-differentiatie) c. Regels van inclusie en exclusie ("als (niet) x, dan (niet) y") 2. Dominantie van een enkelvoudige evaluatie (persoonlijke waarde bovenop) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gebrek aan verklaring van gegeven dimensie (geen differentiatie van tweede argument) b. Lijsten 3. Conflict vermijding (vermijden of reduceren van ambiguïteit, complexiteit en conflict) 4. Voorgescreven (normatieve) generalisaties (zonder rekening te houden met haalbaarheid, kosten, omstandigheden) 5. Tijdelijke opeenvolging (eenvoudige conclusietrekkingen zoals causale of tijds-relaties) 	absoluut, alles, altijd, zeker, constant, overtuigd, volledig, zonder twijfel

2	Gedeeltelijke differentiatie / geen integratie	erkenning of gedeeltelijke aanvaarding maar geen verdieping van meerdere dimensies → eenvoudige kwalificatie zonder uitweiding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gedeeltelijke acceptatie van andere perspectieven (of dimensies), (iets meer dan alles-of-niets) 2. Voorwaardelijke statements (er is ruimte voor voorwaarden) 3. Mogelijkheden voor hypothetische uitkomsten 4. Uitzondering op de regel 5. Blijk van erkenning van alternatieven perspectieven zonder specificatie of uitleg 6. Verhoogde tolerantie t.o.v. ambiguïteit (stap verder dan 1.3) 	maar, daarentegen, terwijl, echter, etc., en waarschijnlijk, normaal gezien, meestal, vrijwel, etc.
3	Differentiatie / geen integratie	erkenning van (verschillende) alternatieve perspectieven, en die allen worden gezien als relevant, gerechtvaardigd en valide	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meerdere alternatieven <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Verscheidenheid aan perspectieven worden belicht (meerdere kanten van een verhaal) b. Meerdere dimensies c. Zowel meerdere perspectieven als dimensies (combinatie) 2. Alternatieven en voorwaarden voor toepassing (specificatie van complexe voorwaarden van voorwaarden) 3. Uiting van waarschijnlijkheid (er zijn meerdere oorzaken of determinanten die leiden tot conclusies) (bouwt voort op 2.2) 4. Perspectieven op volgtijdelijkheid (argumentatie waarom nieuw perspectief/benadering volgt op verouderde) (veel verder dan 1.5) 5. Verhoogde tolerantie t.o.v. ambiguïteit (stap verder dan 2.6) 	zoals bij 2, maar vaak expliciet toegelicht met woorden zoals 'alternatief', van de andere kant, etc.

4	Differentiatie / sporen van integratie (impliciet)	er worden niet alleen verschillende perspectieven aangeboden en geaccepteerd, maar er wordt tevens erkend dat deze een dynamische relatie (interactie) met elkaar hebben	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Oordeel wordt vermeden (meer informatie is nodig) 2. Spanning tussen alternatieven (meerdere perspectieven hebben met elkaar te maken en zijn afhankelijk van elkaar) 3. Integratie door waarschijnlijkheid (aannemelijkheid door redenering; 'het lijkt mogelijk/aannemelijk dat...') 4. Integratie uitgedrukt door een bovenliggend statement (vaak in eerste zin wordt een conclusie gesteld, dat later wordt verklaard als het gevolg van de beredenering) 	
5	Differentiatie / gedeeltelijke integratie (expliciet)	meerdere perspectieven worden gelijkwaardig behandeld en afgewogen en met elkaar in verband gebracht	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wederzijdse beïnvloeding en afhankelijkheid van dimensies 2. Onderhandeling (geven en nemen om tot een oplossing te komen) 3. Causale toeschrijving (expliciete verklaring waarom meerdere redenen overwogen kunnen worden) 4. Synthese (een nieuw 'product', inzicht, beleid, wordt verklaard als de uitkomst van de interactie tussen de dimensies, wetten van de logica) 	verwijzen vaak expliciet naar interactie, wederzijdse afhankelijkheid en compromissen
6	Differentiatie / grote mate van integratie	Interactie tussen dimensies wordt expliciet voorgesteld door middel van schemata, systemen en algemene inzichten en organisatieprincipes (zoals ideologieën, causale relaties, etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vergelijking van verschillende uitkomsten (verschillende mogelijke resultaten worden besproken en overwogen) 2. Systematische analyse (perspectief wordt gezien in het licht binnen de complexiteit van relaties, netwerken en systemen die elkaar beïnvloeden) 3. Testen van hypothesen (wetenschappelijk) 	

7	Differentiatie / volledige integratie	overkoepelende of alomvattende inkadering van verschillende alternatieven en perspectieven en door discussie/beredenering wordt de validiteit aangetoond	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hiërarchische integratie (integratie van integraties) 2. Vergelijking van verschillende uitkomsten (stap verder dan 6.1) 3. Systematische analyse (stap verder dan 6.2) 4. Complexe uitwisseling tussen conflicterende doeleinden (zoals complexe kosten-baten analyse)
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Table C.6: Example coding integrative complexity score (for one text sample)

Source code:	2014.01.11
Date:	08/09/2014
Actor:	Politician 1
Party:	Party 1
Paragraph code	Complexity score
1.1	2
1.2	1
1.3	1
1.4	3
1.5	2
Average:	1,8

NEDERLANDSTALIGE SAMENVATTING

NEDERLANDSTALIGE SAMENVATTING

Woorden zijn niet onschuldig; de manier waarop we gebruik maken van woorden en taal bepaalt hoe we de wereld om ons heen waarnemen, hoe we er betekenis aan geven, en markeert machtsverhoudingen tussen mensen en tussen samenlevingen. De (strategische) manier waarop woorden, of taal in het algemeen, gebruikt wordt met als doel om een ander te overtuigen, staat bekend als retoriek. De retoriek in politieke taal (politieke retoriek) is het centrale thema van dit proefschrift. Het doel van deze dissertatie is het gebruik van verschillende retorische variabelen in politieke taal te onderzoeken. Hierbij wordt door middel van beschrijvende analyse beoogd de kenmerken van (bepaalde) retorische taal te duiden, en door middel van comparatief onderzoek de verschillen in retorische taal tussen politieke partijen aan te geven, in de politieke contexten van Nederland en Vlaanderen (België). Speciale interesse gaat uit naar (verschillen in) politieke ideologie, leiderschap en de ‘rol’ die een politieke partij heeft in het parlement. Daarnaast worden de effecten van veranderende omstandigheden (bijvoorbeeld binnen en buiten crisissituaties) op de retoriek gemeten. De tweede doelstelling is om politieke retoriek te koppelen aan de specifieke taal van populisme en de populistische leiders in Nederland en Vlaanderen.

In dit onderzoek komen hoofdzakelijk drie retorische variabelen aan bod. We meten (1) het gebruik van het stijlmiddel metafoor, waarbij twee domeinen van verschillende betekenis verbonden worden om taal meer divers en kleurrijk te maken, (2) het gebruik van het stijlfiguur hyperbool, waarbij bepaalde elementen in woord of tekst geïntensiveerd worden om een grotere retorische impact te creëren, en (3) de mate van *integratieve* complexiteit, wat wijst op de mate van cognitieve vereenvoudiging in argumentatie en redenering. Aangezien retorische stijlfiguren een strategisch persuasief doel kunnen dienen, kan worden verwacht dat hoe, wanneer en in welke mate retorische variabelen gebruikt worden in politieke taal, afhankelijk is van bepaalde ‘voorwaarden’. De kracht van figuurlijke taal is dat eerder de emotie dan de ratio aangesproken wordt en het (soms reeds bestaande) emoties kan aanwakkeren of opwekken. Retorisch taalgebruik wordt zodoende gebruikt om bijvoorbeeld de toehoorder op het gemak of gerust te stellen, maar even makkelijk wordt het tegenovergestelde gedaan en worden juist sterke negatieve gevoelens (zoals angst, woede of paniek) uitgelokt. Afhankelijk

van het (gepercipieerde) niveau van sociale instabiliteit kunnen politieke partijen dus profiteren van het gebruik van metaforische, hyperbolische en simplistische taal als onderdeel van hun politieke communicatieve strategie.

In een reeks van empirische studies worden drie belangrijke conclusies getrokken. Ten eerste hangen de verschillen in retoriek voor een groot deel af van kenmerken die (op een bepaald moment) kunnen worden toegeschreven aan een partij. Partijen ‘gedragen’ zich bijvoorbeeld naar de ‘rol’ (zoals die van oppositie) die ze (zouden moeten) hebben in het parlement. Ten tweede lijken ‘ideologische verschillen’ een bepalende factor voor verschillen in communicatiestijl te zijn. En ten derde hanteren bepaalde partijen een zeker permanent hoog retorisch niveau, waarmee zij zich onderscheiden van de doorsnee politieke partij. Op basis van de drie belangrijkste variabelen die zijn opgenomen in dit proefschrift – metafoor, hyperbool en integratieve complexiteit – zien we dat de meest afwijkende retoriek voortdurend toegeschreven kan worden aan dezelfde politieke partijen: de *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) in Nederland, evenals *Libertair, Direct, Democratisch* (LDD) en *Vlaams Belang* (VB) in Vlaanderen. Deze partijen, die gewoonlijk worden aangeduid als populistische en/of radicale rechtse partijen, zijn daarom interessante casussen voor grondiger retorisch onderzoek.

In de huidige tijden van economische en culturele crisis, waarin veel mensen politiek gedesoriënteerd en vervreemd zijn, zich zorgen maken om economische en culturele dreigingen, kan het een zeer aanlokkelijke strategie zijn om de politiek *bigger, better and simpler* te laten lijken. De retoriek van deze partijen anticipeert op de populistische moralistische ideologie van een politiek ‘door en voor de gewone man’, dus populistische taal behoort simplistisch, recht door zee, en ‘antipolitiek’ te zijn. Het krachtige emotionele figuurlijk discours, de veelheid aan retorische overdrijvingen, het simplisme, de afwezigheid van twijfel en nuance, en het ontbreken van het aanbieden van mogelijke oplossingen, zijn allemaal sterk verbonden met de radicale retorische stijl die vaak wordt toegeschreven aan de succesvolle, maar vaak ook bekritiseerde, populistische partijen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS/ DANKWOORD

"Nobody said it was easy."

No one ever said it would be so hard"

From The Scientist (by Coldplay)

DANKWOORD

Een promotieonderzoek schrijven is uiteraard geen gemakkelijke opgave, maar de weg van de minste weerstand heb ik zeker niet gekozen. In plaats van veilige oorden, zocht ik naar de onontdekte plekken, onontgonnen terreinen, met theorieën die al tijden niet meer waren geüpdatet, methodes die nog moesten worden ontwikkeld, en onderwerpen die al jaren zorgen voor discussie en onenigheid, of toch op zijn minst vatbaar zijn voor verandering en interpretatie. Het maakte het gehele proces alleen maar gecompliceerder, maar tegelijkertijd gelukkig ook uitdagend en origineel (zo hield ik mezelf maar voor), enorm leerzaam, en af en toe zelfs leuk. Als ik een ding heb geleerd in de afgelopen zeven jaar is het wel dat ik het zeker niet helemaal alleen had kunnen doen. Zodoende maak ik van deze gelegenheid gebruik om een dankwoord te richten tot de mensen die, in wat voor rol dan ook, hebben bijgedragen aan de totstandkoming van dit proefschrift.

Op de eerste plaats dank ik mijn promotor **Christ'1 De Landtsheer** voor haar rotsvaste geloof in mijn kunnen, haar creativiteit en het meedenken, haar vele ideeën en tips. Zij heeft me echt bij de hand genomen en kennis laten maken met de wetenschappelijke wereld zowel binnen als buiten de onderzoeksgroep Politieke Communicatie. We hebben de afgelopen jaren enorm veel meegemaakt en doorstaan. Van Istanbul tot Aalborg, van San Francisco tot Rome, en van Montreal tot aan Madrid (om er maar een paar te noemen): ik had nooit gedacht zoveel mensen op zo veel verschillende plaatsen te mogen ontmoeten.

Grote dank gaat ook uit naar de leden van mijn commissie: **Henk Dekker**, **Martina Temmerman** en **Philippe De Vries**. Zij hebben mij op allerlei vlakken, elk op hun eigen specifieke manier, enorm geholpen met nuttige adviezen, kritische noten en opbeurende aanmoedigingen. Daarnaast was het eveneens een enorm prettige samenwerking. Zonder hen was dit werk zeker nooit afgekomen.

Tevens wil ik mijn zus **Marthe Kalkhoven** bedanken voor het ontwerp van

het proefschrift. Zowel de buiten- als binnenkant heeft zij voor haar rekening genomen en het resultaat is – zoals met al haar werk – buitengewoon. Het is een zegen om zulk talent dichtbij te hebben.

Met een grote groep collega's om je heen, die allemaal in hetzelfde schuitje zitten, voelt het soms alsof je allemaal tezamen werkt aan de totstandkoming van één doctoraat. Ik het geluk heb gehad om een grote groep jonge mensen te leren kennen in Antwerpen, waarmee ik heb kunnen overleggen, adviezen kunnen uitwisselen en het leed heb mogen delen dat dit werk soms met zich meebrengt. Hoewel ik hen allemaal uit de grond van mijn hart dank, zijn er enkele personen die speciale aandacht verdienen. **Suzanne** voor haar naleeswerk, de vele gesprekken die we (soms over het doctoraat) hebben gevoerd en onze woensdagmiddagafspraken in de periode na de Universiteit, waarbij we geprobeerd hebben elkaar te helpen voorbereiden op het vervolg van onze levens. Vriend en collega **Sam**, mijn vaste koffie- en gesprekspartner, waarbij we aan het koffiemachine als twee oude zielen in jonge lichamen hebben gefilosofeerd over de staat van het onderwijs, de universiteit, het land, de politiek, en bovenal – waarschijnlijk het belangrijkste – het voetbal. Ik mag hier zeker ook niet de jongens van de Zurenborg Conventie vergeten, waarmee ik vooral met de oude garde **Wannes**, **Sil**, **Jelle**, meer dan eens onder het genot van een goede trappist, werk en leven heb besproken.

Speciale dank gaat ook uit naar **Pauline**. Zij promoveerde van klasgenoot, naar collega, naar goede vriendin. Op de eerste plaats is Pauline mij van grote dienst geweest op werkgebied. Met haar scherpe oog en toewijding heeft ze mij enorm geholpen het introductiehoofdstuk te verbeteren. Daarbij heeft ze met haar inbreng ons gezamenlijk Leeronderzoek naar een hoger niveau gebracht. Het is een geluk om samen te mogen werken met zo'n bekwame collega en goede vriendin. Dit geldt eveneens voor **Julie**, een vriendin die ook collega werd, wat het leven op de Universiteit Antwerpen alleen maar leuker maakte.

Vrienden en familie spelen vaak een grotere rol in het hele proces van promoveren dan zij misschien vermoeden. Zij zien je weliswaar niet elke dag op de universiteit, maar op de achtergrond dragen zij allen enorm bij. De vrienden

van de **Bende van A** zijn bijvoorbeeld ongelooflijk belangrijk geweest in mijn tijd in Antwerpen, vooral voor alle activiteiten buiten het doctoren om. Vakanties, weekendjes weg, sporten, spelletjes- en vaste café-avonden: het zorgde ervoor dat Antwerpen als mijn thuis voelde en dat ik er nu al met heimwee op terugkijk. Bijzondere hulde gaat uit naar **Pieterjan** voor zijn organisatorisch talent van dit alles, maar bovenal zijn grote vriendschap. En natuurlijk **Nonkel Wannes** voor zijn bier en chips.

Gelukkig heb ik in 's-Hertogenbosch ook nog altijd een tweede thuis, dat nu weer mijn eerste thuis is geworden. Mijn dank gaat uit naar de *usual suspects* die er al waren en altijd zullen blijven bestaan, **Wouter, Roel, Willem, Arjan** en **Tjerk**, en alle andere vrienden en vriendinnen die ik door de jaren heen heb mogen verzamelen, voor hun belangstelling en aanmoediging.

Ik mag mij zeer gelukkig prijzen met de warmte en liefde van mijn familie. Ten eerste wil ik zowel **Marthe** en **Gies**, als **Freek** en **Ellis** danken voor hun oprechte interesse en hun betrokkenheid. Daarnaast gaat de grootste dank uit naar mijn vader en moeder. **Charles** en **Mirjam** (in de volksmond ook wel pa en ma genoemd) zullen niet beseffen hoe belangrijk zij voor mij zijn. Hun onvoorwaardelijke steun, het rotsvaste vertrouwen in mij, het luisterende oor dat zij mij te allen tijde bieden, het gevoel van trots dat ik soms voel... alleen al daarvoor is dit allemaal de moeite waard geweest.

Tot slot wil ik mijn lieve **Elvi** bedanken. Hoewel zij pas in de eindfase van het promoveren in beeld kwam, is zij het afgelopen jaar van onschatbare waarde geweest voor mij. Zij staat symbool voor een nieuwe levensfase, zij geeft me kracht en energie om dit hoofdstuk af te sluiten en een nieuw boek te openen. Nu heb ik heb eindelijk mijn toekomst gevonden.